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INDIA TODAY
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PHOTOS
INDIA
ENTERTAINMENT
SPORTS
Soldiers practise yoga at Siachen...
Life goes on for Sushma Swaraj
Lalit Modi: Who said what
Prepping for Yoga Day with Baba...
AAP leaders turn Safai karmachari
Rahul Gandhi meets sanitation...
Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu...
Royal Bengal tiger kills boar in...
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FROM THE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ABANDONED WIDOWS OF MAHARASHTRA
AMAZON HEAT ON INDIAN E-TAILERS
HANDLOOM: THE NEW FASHION MANTRA
INDIA TODAY
MODI BOUNCES BACK
EXCLUSIVE MOOD OF THE NATION SURVEY REVEALS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE NDA HAVE RECOVERED GROUND AFTER A TWO-YEAR SLUMP

Our last MOTN cover, Aug 29, 2016

All politicians come to power promising hope—whether it is Barack Obama who pledged Yes We Can, Donald Trump who wants to Make America Great Again or Narendra Modi who spoke of *achhe din*. However, delivering on promises is easier said than done. It requires conviction, audacity and courage. The respondents to our biannual Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll have understood this to mean being "unafraid of taking risks", and have rated it as the prime minister's strongest characteristic; it manifested itself in the surgical strikes against Pakistan as well as in demonetisation. There is a spate of good news for Modi—he is considered the best prime minister so far, displacing both Indira Gandhi and A.B. Vajpayee; two-thirds of the respondents believe he is best suited to lead the nation. And the ruling NDA's vote share, should the country go to polls right now, is 42 per cent, getting them a potential 360 seats, more than the number that swept them to power.

What's more, the popularity gap between him and his nearest rival is enormous; Rahul Gandhi scores a measly 10 per cent against Modi's 65. Yet, the respondents are not blinded by their endorsement of Modi's policies. Over half of them believe demonetisation was poorly implemented, causing more pain than gain. Clearly, halfway into his term, the PM has established a direct, deeply emotive rapport with the people, sometimes urging them to savage him at a public square if he fails and at other times reminding them of his outsider status, the 'fakir' who needs not even a minute's notice to abandon the trappings of power. He has convinced them of his brand of 'ashawadi' (hopeful) politics and a reimagined India.

Modi's Action Hero image has served his alliance well. Its rating is 71 per cent, up from a fading 48 per cent in the August 2016 MOTN poll. But the PM would do well to listen to the latent anxieties of his people—unemployment and corruption remain major concerns, followed by cash crunch and price rise. The people of India have tremendous patience, but they need more than fine speeches and good intentions to keep their faith in him. The PM has radically altered the political landscape with his overwhelming personality for now. The results of the forthcoming state elections will be a vindication or otherwise of his unique style of leadership.

On another note, dear reader, you have in your hands a reinvented INDIA TODAY. We live in a time where we are flooded with information 24x7 from anyone, anywhere and at anytime, but it remains important to know what is significant and what is the truth. In all the noise that surrounds us, truth has almost become an endangered species. INDIA TODAY has always striven to get you the truth without any agendas and provide you an understanding on issues that really matter. In keeping with the changing times, INDIA TODAY has been re-envisaged to enhance not only its core values of clarity, credibility and relevance but also provide you with a dazzling variety of finely-curated information and features. As you are a thinking Indian and an important part of the conversations happening in India, I believe, INDIA TODAY will remain a must-read for you. Happy reading.

(Aroon Purie)

STATES

GOA: PIVOTS OF PANJIM
PG 14

BIHAR: BOOM TIME FOR BOOTLEGGERS
PG 17

INSIDE

LEISURE

BORDERLESS TELEVISION
PG 66

BOY WONDER SUNNY PAWAR
PG 70

COVER STORY

20

Still the Man

Demonetisation has made no dent in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity. Don't believe it? Read the INDIA TODAY-Karvy Insights poll

UPFRONT

9

CARELESS WHISPER

Manmohan Vaidya set the cat among the pigeons when he said caste-based reservations should be set aside

PREBUDGET

52

FM HOUR

Budget 2017 is the most difficult as well as the most crucial for the Modi govt as it battles uncertainty at home and globally

LEISURE

65

WHY LIVE A DOUBLE LIFE?

Transgender Nepalese model Anjali Lama on how she beat the odds to be where she is today: walking the ramp at LIFW

Cover by **NILANJAN DAS**

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BJP'S UP COCKTAIL PG 8

TRUMP'S WORLD PG 18

UPFRONT

RAMPAGING BULLS PG 10

WHAT AILS THE CBI? PG 22

TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

PARVEEN NEGI

GETTING INVOLVED Priyanka Gandhi leaving the residence of Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad after a meeting

POLL ALLIANCE

PRIYANKA, FRONT AND CENTRE

By Piyush Babele

Like an exhumed corpse that sits up without warning, the Congress finds itself resuscitated by its alliance with the Samajwadi Party. Fresh energy seems to have been infused into the Uttar Pradesh polls too, which begin on February 11. After fevered speculation and wide acknowledgement that a tie-up would be the obvious counter to a BJP that had enjoyed great success in UP in the 2014 general election, annexing 71 of 80 seats, the worst-kept secret in town was confirmed on Sunday evening, January 22, at a luxury hotel in Lucknow.

The Congress will field candidates in 105 seats and senior partner SP in 298. Some last-minute haggling led to further speculation and rubbernecking in the press before Congress general secretary Ahmed Patel confirmed on Twitter that an agreement had been reached. Patel, who doubles as Congress president Sonia Gandhi's Man Friday, namechecked Priyanka Gandhi in particular. Sources familiar with the negotiations said several senior leaders in both the SP and Congress were unhappy and tried to block the alliance.

But in refuting one set of speculative reports, Patel set off a flurry of further excited speculation. Exactly what role will Priyanka Gandhi be playing in the UP election? According to Ghulam Nabi Azad, in charge of UP, "Priyankaji played a key role in the formation of the alliance." Sources close to the negotiations said Rahul Gandhi had made up his mind in favour of a pact with the SP after his 'khat yatra' in the state back in September.

Priyanka was drafted in as the closer of the deal. When Congress stalwart Kapil Sibal represented Akhilesh Yadav at the Election Commission in his bid to secure rights to the SP cycle, the 25-year-old party's calling card, it appeared a tie-up was certain. But Azam Khan, an SP stalwart, had expressed the view that an alliance with the Congress might result, in the long term, in a haemorrhaging of minority votes from the former to the latter. And once the SP announced its list of 191 candidates, its fledgling alliance with the Congress already appeared in jeopardy.

The frost thawed after Priyanka spoke to Akhilesh. Sources said she sent as many as nine text messages to Akhilesh before changing tack and calling his wife Dimple. The next morning, Dimple connected Akhilesh to Priyanka. Azam Khan too had a change of heart.

Rahul's mind was made up after the 'khat yatra', Priyanka helped close the deal

"Don't go into all the details," Khan sighed, when asked by this reporter about the negotiations, "because the past four months have seemed like a mini epoch. But now the alliance is a reality and the people of UP are going to make Akhilesh the CM again, with the blessings of netaji." The last, of course, is a politic reference to Mulayam Singh Yadav, Akhilesh's ousted father, still sulking at being outmanoeuvred by his son, long derided by the likes of Amar Singh as a political naif.

Priyanka, unlike Akhilesh or Rahul, has rarely been patronised. Instead, she has enjoyed a mystique, her charisma spoken of with reverence by party workers and Congress watchers. She is said to have a surer political instinct than her brother and a greater connect with voters. Such is the 'clamour', insiders say, for Priyanka among Congress workers in UP that the party is careful to present her and Rahul as a team so that he is not undermined. Pradeep Jain Aditya, a prominent Congress face in Bundelkhand, said he was happy "Priyankaji would play a larger than expected role in these polls". That said, she is not expected to campaign outside the family strongholds of Raebareli and Amethi.

"Priyankaji enjoys mass popularity," Aditya added, "people see in her the image of her grandmother, the strength of Indira Gandhi."

TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

ELECTION MODE

BJP MIXES UP COCKTAIL

By Uday Mahurkar

When it comes to the Uttar Pradesh election, all eyes have been drawn to the Samajwadi Party's alliance with the Congress. The BJP will now put its faith in its star campaigners to wrest back the momentum.

Officially, the BJP will campaign on the platform of development. According to party president Amit Shah, "good governance remains the main issue." The BJP anticipates that demonetisation will work in its favour, and party workers claim that UP voters see it as a decisive move against "the scourge of black money." Kirtivardhan Singh, BJP MP from Gonda, insists that people in his constituency admire the prime minister's "courage to take on the rich". Poverty alleviation, he says, will be a cornerstone of the BJP's campaign.

Unofficially, the election will still be fought on the old battleground of identity politics

"We are," says Shah, "promising a new UP to voters, [one] that is in direct contrast to the corruption and misgovernance of both the SP and BSP. Other issues are side issues." But many in the state party warn that those side issues may prove vital. Akhilesh Yadav, the UP chief minister, is positioning himself as the face of development. His success in steering the SP out of the clutches of its politicking old guard

BJP PRESIDENT
AMIT SHAH

may convince voters that the party's association with criminals has been replaced by a focus on progress.

Unofficially, and despite the recent Supreme Court ruling, the UP election will be fought on the old battleground of communal tension and identity politics. Religious vote-catchers loom large on each side. Azam Khan, a master of getting out the Muslim vote, has been given a ticket by Akhilesh, as has Khan's son. The BJP's most boldface campaigners include Yogi Adityanath, Sanjeev Baliyan, Sangeet Som and Suresh Rana. The latter three are infamous for their alleged roles in inciting the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots. A BJP leader who preferred to remain anonymous says, "Cow slaughter, love jehad, the partisan behaviour of UP police in favour of Muslims, and the SP's 'goonda raj' will be major issues." Sources close to Amit Shah say that "when the SP is playing the Muslim card behind the scenes and Muslim leadership openly talks about 'tactical voting', there is no alternative for us but to turn to Hindutva, based on specific issues".

Party insiders are concerned that the BJP has yet to put forward a chief ministerial candidate. Four candidates have come to the fore: Keshav Prasad Maurya, the party's state president; Manoj Sinha, the current communications minister; Yogi Adityanath and Rajnath Singh, the home minister. Adityanath and Rajnath Singh are the most immediately recognisable. But Adityanath is a polarising figure and was recently reported to have dramatically walked out of a national executive meeting in Delhi.

Given the margin of the BJP's 2014 general election triumph in UP, its position is strong. But despite the lip service to 'good governance', it relies heavily on the prime minister's popularity and Hindutva. Faced with a reinvigorated SP and Congress alliance, the stakes are high, and the path to victory, tortuous.

PULLQUOTE

“The Election Commission should make me its brand ambassador”

ARVIND KEJRIWAL, in a letter to chief election commissioner Nasim Zaidi, argued that the EC had misinterpreted his suggestion that voters in Goa accept bribes from Opposition parties but cast their votes for AAP. The EC rapped him for it, but Kejriwal countered that the EC had failed to stop graft

Choking Hazard

Last week, the Supreme Court described air pollution as a "very serious" problem, for which "we need to find solutions fast". More people die in India and China than anywhere else because of the air they breathe. Particulate matter in the atmosphere is carcinogenic, and fine particles (PM2.5) are particularly dangerous because they penetrate deeper into our lungs. At least, China is doing something about it.

PEOPLE AT A PROTEST ON AIR POLLUTION IN DELHI

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

CHINA

-17%

percentage change in PM2.5 levels between 2010 and 2015

INDIA

+13%

percentage change in PM2.5 levels between 2010 and 2015

CHINA

1,500

PM2.5 monitoring stations, across 900 cities

INDIA

39

PM2.5 monitoring stations, across 23 cities

Source: Greenpeace air pollution report 2017

TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

EXPOSURE

RUNNING WITH THE BULLS

Since 2011, the Supreme Court has made clear its low opinion of Jallikattu, the supposedly millennia-old Tamil sport of bull-taming. In May 2014, the court specifically said that bulls "cannot be allowed as performing animals" for such events. Matters came to a head this month as tens of thousands protesters swarmed the streets of Chennai to claim jallikattu as intrinsic to Tamil identity. The court ban was temporarily overturned. Just a day later, two men were gored to death and several dozen injured as bulls rampaged through dusty village streets

AFP

PTI

TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

GETTYIMAGES

JAISON G.

ANGRY PROTESTS (Clockwise from left) A car set on fire by protesters, Tamil Nadu CM O. Panneerselvam, students protesting the ban at Marina Beach

PERSPECTIVE

WHY THE DISQUIET

By S. Srinivasan

It was a human tsunami on Marina Beach in Chennai, the likes of which have not been seen in Tamil Nadu in recent times. What started as a student protest had, by evening, swelled to hundreds of thousands of slogan-shouting, if peaceful, youngsters demanding that the government lift the ban on Jallikattu. It soon spread, and an estimated 15 million—one in every five residents of Tamil Nadu—were on the streets protesting.

The feud, which has been raging for over a decade, is now a bone of contention between animal lovers and farmers. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) activists say the bulls are subjected to cruelty, force-fed with liquor and have chilli powder thrown into their eyes. Those who rear the bulls say they are looked after as well as their own children and if they are harmed during the sport, the event is called off. Tamils have long held that the sport has cultural and religious significance.

After several court battles between animal lovers and jallikattu organisers, the Supreme Court banned it in 2014, saying the prevention of cruelty to animals overrides the protection of culture and tradition. On January 8 last year, the Centre issued a notification lifting the ban in Tamil Nadu with certain restrictions, which was challenged in the apex court. The court reserved its judgment. Stunned by the protests, the state government, aided by PM Narendra Modi, enacted a state law lifting the ban.

The agitation may have ebbed, but the fire is unlikely to die soon. There are many reasons why Tamil sub-nationalism has come to the fore. The death of J. Jayalalithaa, and the indifferent health of her arch-rival, the aging former chief minister M. Karunanidhi of the DMK, have left a void in Tamil Nadu politics. The perception that chief minister O. Panneerselvam is not quite his own man strengthened the belief that the Centre could ride roughshod over the state. The Centre's inability to force Karnataka to release Cauvery waters to Tamil Nadu, despite a Supreme Court order, only added to the grist. Jallikattu was the final straw.

The surge in Tamil nationalism is owed partly to the current political vacuum

Politically, the loudest message came from Panneerselvam. A man seen to be keeping the seat warm for Jayalalithaa has finally signalled his arrival. It is not good news for the newly anointed AIADMK general secretary, V.K. Sasikala.

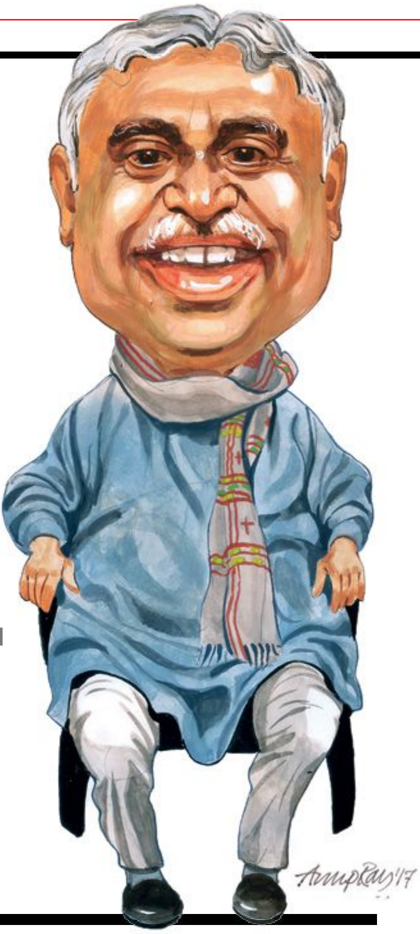
Politics in Tamil Nadu is clearly changing. People have been unhappy with state governments for their failure to stop land and mining mafias from plundering riverbeds and agricultural fields. Though Tamil Nadu is one of the most urbanised states, it has a strong rural connect.

For the past few decades, the administration in Tamil Nadu has been oppressive, leaving little space for dissent. It is, therefore, unsurprising that, with a weak government at the helm, the students on Marina and elsewhere voiced their new-found freedom.

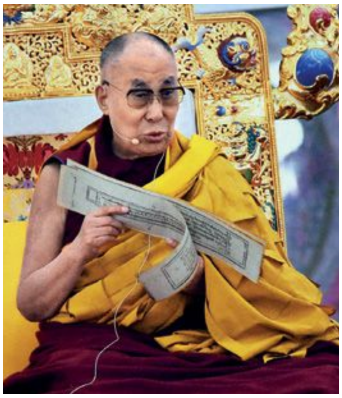
The author is an editorial director of news channel **Puthiya Thalaimurai**

GLASSHOUSE

CARELESS WHISPERS



Sanjay Joshi is an RSS pracharak with considerable clout. Despite incurring the wrath of Narendra Modi, he retains support within the BJP. Some even talk of a 'Joshi faction' opposed to the all-powerful prime minister. Such gossip has reared its head because of controversial comments by senior RSS leader **Manmohan Vaidya** opposing caste-based reservations. The Sangh clarified that the remarks referred to Muslim reservations, but that hasn't stopped tongues wagging. Vaidya is considered close to the Nagpur-based Joshi and his supporters, who have long mistrusted Modi's political ambitions. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat continues to play referee.


PTI

Great Firewall Breached

Tibetans in China have been sharing images on social media of themselves watching the **Dalai Lama**'s teachings at the Kalachakra festival in Bodh Gaya. This was in defiance of Chinese authorities. Thousands of pilgrims were recalled from India or prevented from travelling to the festival earlier this month. The Chinese even declared it illegal in 2012, when it was last held in Bodh Gaya.

40, Not Out

Ordinarily, only women between the ages of 18 and 40 are entitled to claim the Rs 1 lakh towards their wedding expenses that Goa chief minister **Laxmikant Parsekar**'s Ladli Laxmi scheme promises. But, as the Goa assembly elections fast approach (February 4), Parsekar is clearing grants to 311 women, all of whom are over the age of 40, as a one-time waiver. Lucky girls. Proof that, at least during the polls, there's life after 40.

Bad Timing

Nityanand Rai, the new chief of the BJP in Bihar, had planned to hold the party's two-day state executive meeting on January 5 in Siwan, the bastion of RJD strongman Mohammed Shahabuddin. The idea was to send a strong message against lawlessness in the state. The meeting was held at the appointed date. But it was completely overlooked as chief minister Nitish Kumar hogged the headlines by forming the world's largest human chain in support of prohibition. The best laid plans of mice and men etc.

RAJWANT RAWAT

INDEX

Inequality Street

A recent report by the not-for-profit charity, Oxfam, raises uncomfortable questions about the amount of wealth held by the rich. Its data shows India to be one of the most unequal countries on the planet.

84
The number of billionaires in India

$248
In billions, the total wealth of Indian billionaires. It translates to over Rs 20,000 crore each

58%
The share of the country's wealth owned by top 1%, significantly higher than the global average of 51%

Rs 33
What 670 million Indians, over half the population, in rural areas live on per day

—**Sandeep Unnithan** ***with Anshuman Tiwari, Kiran Tare, Amitabh Srivastava and Ananth Krishnan***

DIPLOMACY

TRUMP'S WORLD

By Nirupama Rao

With the rise of Donald Trump in America, the sun has set on the post-WW II order

It rained a little on the inaugural ceremony of President Donald Trump on January 20. An inauguration like no other, the mood was dark, suffused by anger-on-a-leash, but anger nonetheless. The newly anointed leader-of-the-free world's speech was combative, unsmiling, almost war-painted. His words were a call to arms: making America great again will involve a show of muscle, no speaking softly, and yes, carrying a big stick.

If there was a takeaway from the address for that agglomeration of continents called the rest of the world, it was 'brace, brace, brace!' This is going to be a roller-coaster ride, in a world dictated to by an absence of strategy, by the here and now, as Robert Zoellick said recently.

And India! The partnership between India and the US is the legacy of the Bush and Obama years. Will it endure and flourish? Trump's priorities, as articulated, lie in the elimination of Islamic radicalism, in trade protectionism, in making clear to allies that there are no free rides, in resetting relations with Russia and riling the Chinese. India has not been mentioned—which may be a good thing.

Could it mean it will be a while before India gets the focused attention of the new administration? That may well be the case. The senior appointments to departments that deal with India, including the naming of a new ambassador, will provide the first signals of the approach and emphasis India and the region will receive. Renewed stirrings within the US Congress on restricting visas, which will now be synchronised with the nativist protectionism of a Trump White House, will set off alarms here. The Trump administration's approach to Pakistan will bear watching. That is India's wailing wall, designed to set relations on edge.

Then there's China. Some risk management is advisable. The Trump administration's Asia policy may be elucidated, if at all, with tweets and gunboats, and sabre-rattling and account-squaring may be the daily menu. There is little reason for India to pledge allegiance to American obstreperousness on this count. Our China policy, the balancing of it, must be the sum of its own algorithms, even as we need America, our security and defence relationship, our cooperation in counter-terrorism and our people-centred cooperation.

With the rise of Trump, the sun sets on the post-World War II order. The horizons ahead are ill-defined. Smartness and agility in policy formulation and operationalisation will be at a premium. Interests, not friendships, are the lodestar. Making America great again puts the entire world on notice.

The author is a former foreign secretary

BUREAUCRACY

PMO Makes Babus Sweat

Last week, two Indian Police Service officers and one Indian Administrative Service officer were forced into early retirement on the grounds of inefficiency, non-performance and doubts over their integrity. This was part of a drive by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make the bureaucracy more transparent, more accountable and more productive.

On the advice of the prime minister's office (PMO), the Department of Personnel and Training has made it mandatory for officers from all of the 36 all-India services to file their annual performance appraisal reports (APARs) online. (It will now also be mandatory for civil service officers to file their property returns online.)

Appraisals have been prone to manipulation, an opportunity for senior officers to play favourites or be vindictive. In recent years, about 90 per cent of IAS officers have received 'outstanding' APARs, making the reports practically meaningless. A PMO official says such appraisals will be extended to public service undertakings and even insurance companies. "We want these appraisals to have the cutting edge of a diamond," he says. "They are essential to good governance."

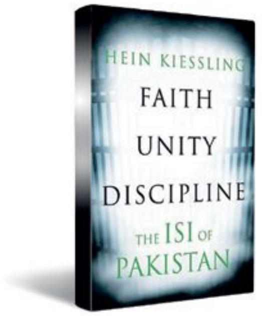
—Uday Mahurkar

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

5 QUESTIONS

“Balochistan Is the ISI’s newest priority”

German political scientist Hein Kiessling lived in Pakistan between 1989 and 2002. The relationships he built in that time earned him unfettered access to the Pakistani army. His new book, *Faith, Unity, Discipline: The ISI of Pakistan*, draws on that to provide deep insights into the ISI’s shadowy workings



Q. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was, you write, the making of the ISI...

A. Yes, it transformed the ISI from an obscure outfit into what it is today. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988 was the ISI’s first big success. After 9/11, the ISI was restructured—it rebirthed the Taliban in 2004. I would rate it as one of the best intelligence agencies in Asia, comparable even to Mossad.

Q. The ISI knew Osama bin Laden (OBL) was in Abbottabad?

A. General Musharraf knew OBL was there. And General Kayani (former Chief of Army Staff) certainly knew. Perhaps two other people within the ISI knew. I believe OBL was sold for the $25 million bounty. But the Pakistan army couldn’t just hand him over to the Americans, nor could they live with being the killers of the Al Qaeda icon.

Q. Did the Pakistan army know about the 26/11 Mumbai attacks?

A. An operation like Mumbai—that needed expertise, money and time to prepare—could not have been done without the knowledge of the service’s leadership. Musharraf must have given his nod to the operation.

Q. Why did the ISI target Mumbai?

A. They wanted to bring some movement on the Kashmir issue; perhaps teach India a lesson.

Q. What are the ISI’s new priorities?

A. Not Afghanistan, not Kashmir. It’s Balochistan. This is because the Chinese have demanded security for their nationals working on the economic corridor. Daesh, or ISIS, is another priority because it has entered Afghanistan. The ISI, I feel, hasn’t made up its mind about Daesh—I asked them in 2015, and still haven’t got a response.

–Sandeep Unnithan

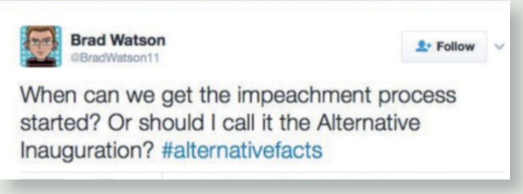
THE CHATTER

The week in social media

@mitalisaran

It was Yuge. Believe me.

On January 20, Donald Trump was sworn in as the 45th president of the US. The Tweeter-in-Chief, ever incapable of stepping out of character into something less obnoxious, began by tweeting about how the inaugural crowd at his swearing-in was the biggest inaugural crowd ever (it wasn’t). His press secretary, Sean Spicer, spent his first press interface repeating that lie; and Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the president, defended it by calling it an ‘alternative fact’.

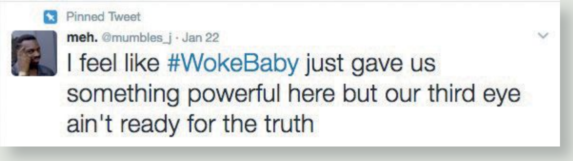


Brad Watson
@BradWatson11

When can we get the impeachment process started? Or should I call it the Alternative Inauguration? #alternativefacts

Talking the Walk

The Women’s March on Washington DC, on the other hand, was a truly, actually yuge protest. A fiery poem written by a 19-year-old and performed by actress Ashley Judd created a firestorm online; but for the star speakers there, from Gloria Steinem to Madonna, it was a chance to advocate revolution and resistance, or, as you can now put it, ‘alternative compliance’.

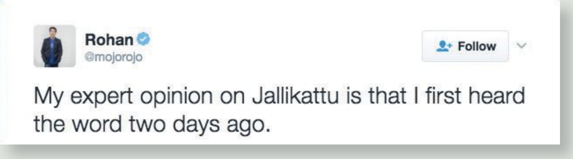


meh. @mumbles_j · Jan 22

I feel like #WokeBaby just gave us something powerful here but our third eye ain't ready for the truth

Jalli(kattu) Wala Bagh

The controversy over Jallikattu in Tamil Nadu, which began with students protesting the Supreme Court ban, has snowballed into a colossal mess of charred police cars and violence. On this, among other issues, cultural chauvinists are sure of their stand, while liberals are spinning in ethical circles. But while it’s a Tamilian issue, North India is used to having an opinion.



Rohan
@mojorojo

My expert opinion on Jallikattu is that I first heard the word two days ago.

POV

What Ails the CBI?

By R.K. Raghavan

A new director is in place at the CBI. By all accounts, Alok Kumar Verma, a former Delhi police commissioner, is a no-nonsense and straightforward officer. He is assuming office at a time when the CBI has a disconcerting image issue. Two of Verma's predecessors are in the dock and being probed for irregularities. This is sad, because the country's highest investigating agency deserves some honest, if not the most efficient, leadership. I am hoping Verma will not let us down. One of his first tasks will be to handle the Supreme Court's directive to probe his predecessor, Ranjit Sinha. The highest professionalism is called for here because whatever he does will later be subject to close judicial scrutiny.

The most damaging accusation against the CBI is that it is heavily politicised and has become so much part and parcel of the executive that it cannot proceed against those in high places within the government. This not a new charge; it has been levelled against the CBI for decades. In my view, this is a sweeping indictment that is only partially true.

The CBI registers about 1,000 cases a year, and only one per cent or less have political overtones. With an ever vigilant media and a combative Opposition, it will be suicidal for the agency to do anything even remotely unethical or under the pressure of the ruling party. To expect a hundred per cent political neutrality in all its decisions, however, is asking for the moon. In the real world, absolute objectivity is a pipe dream, and the CBI does display its own proclivities. (The flip-flop in the cases against Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati are instances where the CBI is hinted to have yielded to political pressure.) Ultimately, it is the quality of leadership that counts. This is why the appointment of a CBI chief or others in the higher echelons known for their professionalism and political neutrality matters.

What I am most concerned about is the reported falling standards of probity among CBI investigating personnel. The CBI has always had a small percentage of officers of doubtful integrity; they would periodically be identified and eased out. Unfortunately, the number of such officers is now believed to have gone up. If true, there is a need for greater supervision of those directly involved in investigation. This makes induction from the IPS at middle levels a delicate and serious exercise. Attracting the best talent and keeping out those wanting to infiltrate the CBI for their own agenda is something Verma will have to give top priority to.

As in many Central Police Organisations (CPOs), there is a grievance within the CBI that direct recruits receive stepmotherly treatment vis-a-vis IPS deputationists. This will again engage the new director's time. There have been periodic efforts to enlarge the promotion opportunities of this class. One must understand there is only so much one can do within the constraints of existing regulations. What should complement this is a constant dialogue between senior and junior officers so that they know there is someone looking out for them.

The principal task of the new director is restoring confidence in the organisation's ability to steer clear of politics and credibly undertake sensitive investigations. During my tenure of more than two years, I found this an absorbing but relatively easy exercise, thanks to an understanding executive that gave me space.

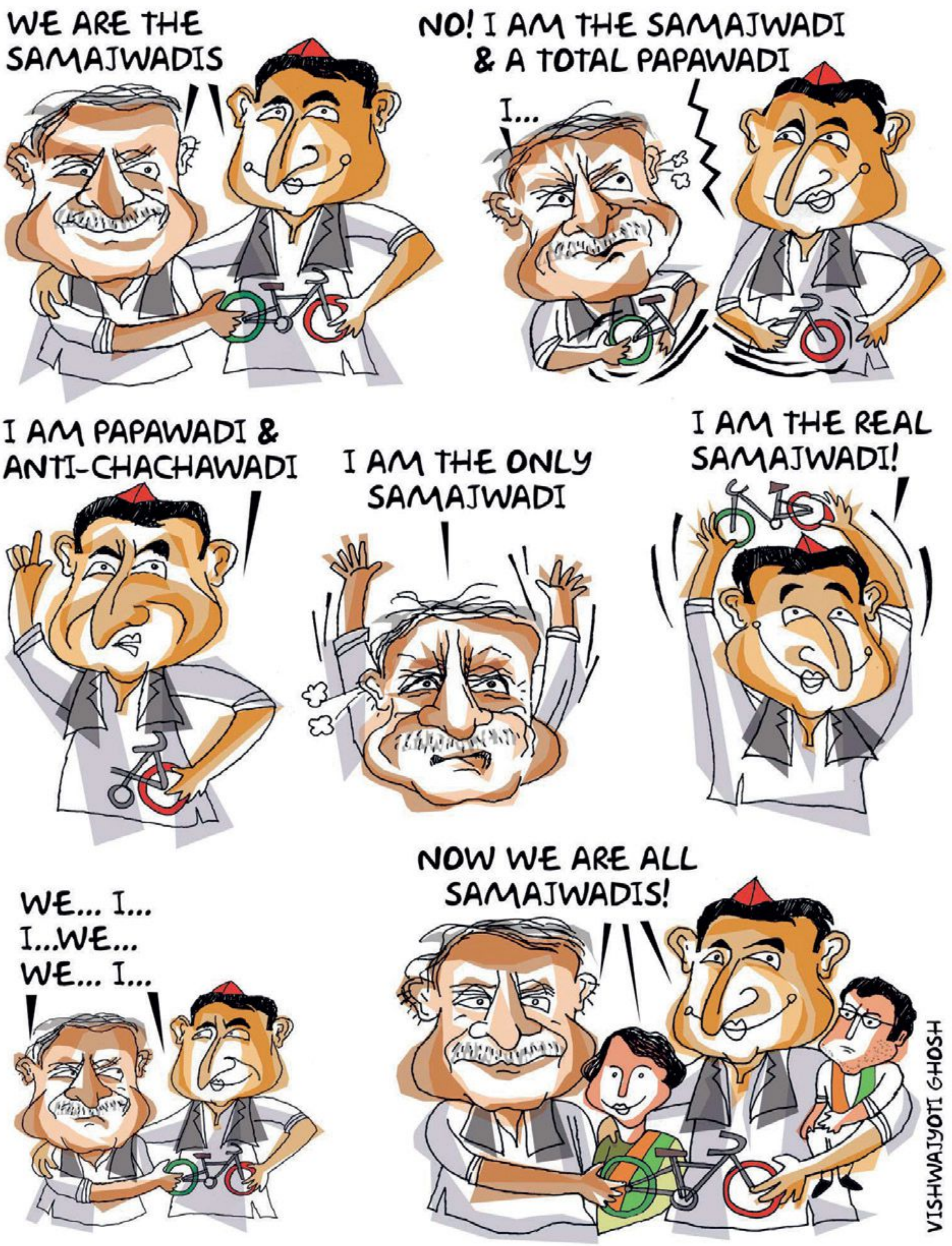
Mutual trust is of the essence. This calls for sobriety and levelheadedness on the part of the director, who must understand that he is part of a well-oiled democratic system that does not permit recklessness or the display of caprice. I am certain Verma will measure up to this exacting standard.

The writer is a former CBI director and current chairman of SIT, Gujarat

One of the first tests for the new CBI director will be to probe the allegations against his predecessor Ranjit Sinha

Illustration by ANIRBAN GHOSH

STORYBOARD


WE ARE THE SAMAJWADIS
NO! I AM THE SAMAJWADI & A TOTAL PAPAWADI
I...
I AM PAPAWADI & ANTI-CHACHAWADI
I AM THE ONLY SAMAJWADI
I AM THE REAL SAMAJWADI!
WE... I... I...WE... WE... I...
NOW WE ARE ALL SAMAJWADIS!
VISHWAJYOTI GHOSH

UTTARAKHAND: FAMILY PERKS PG 27

KERALA: TAPS RUN DRY PG 30

STATES

BIHAR: THE NEW 'BOOM' PG 29

RAJASTHAN: NEW TIGER COUNTRY PG 31

TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

GOA

Pivots of Panjim

Breaking the mould: the new faces shaking up things this election

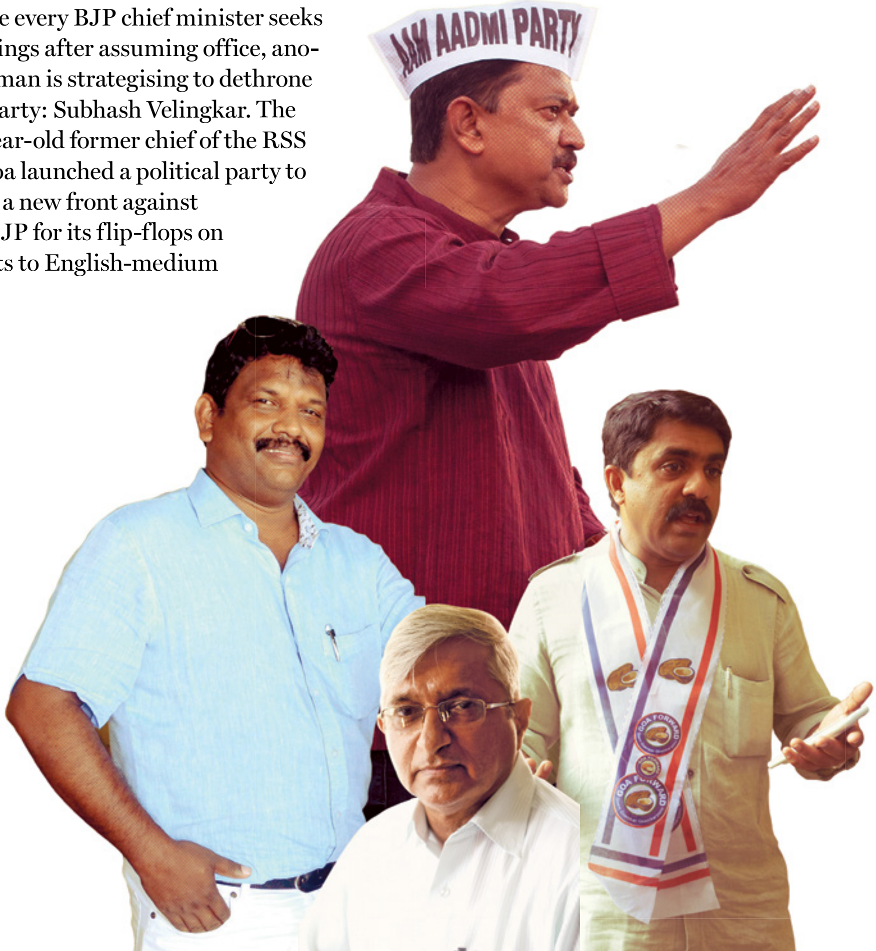
By Kiran D. Tare

Goa's Congress veterans, Pratapsinh Rane and Digambar Kamat, had rushed to Delhi on January 5 to convince party chief Sonia Gandhi to enter into an alliance with the newly formed Goa Forward Party (GFP), saying it had to be done if the party wished to save face in the assembly elections on February 4. For in GFP leader Vijai Sardesai, Rane and Kamat saw someone who could play spoilsport for their party in at least four south Goa seats.

Sardesai isn't the only one to watch out for this Goa election. Goa Suraksha Manch (GSM) patriarch Subhash Velingkar, BJP MLA Michael Lobo and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief ministerial candidate Elvis Gomes are the three other leaders that everyone's keeping an eye on.

A first-time independent MLA from Fatorda in 2012, Sardesai, 46, has today grown into a force to be reckoned with. He snatched the initiative from the opposition Congress by teaming up with independent MLAs Rohan Khaunte and Naresh Saval and cornering the BJP government on issues such as law and order and mining. In October 2015, 11 of the 12 candidates of Fatorda Forward, a group floated by Sardesai, won elections to the 25-member Margao Municipal Council. "Goa will vote to drive the BJP out of the state," he declares.

From a two-storey house in a lane close to Panaji's Mahalaxmi temple, where every BJP chief minister seeks blessings after assuming office, another man is strategising to dethrone the party: Subhash Velingkar. The 67-year-old former chief of the RSS in Goa launched a political party to open a new front against the BJP for its flip-flops on grants to English-medium



THE WAY FORWARD? (Clockwise from left), Michael Lobo, Elvis Gomes, Vijai Sardesai and Subhash Velingkar schools (mostly run by the church). The BJP has, indeed, taken note of his presence. The party had to deny a ticket to assembly speaker Anant Shet from Mayem, where Velingkar has a huge fan following. "We will get the next chief minister to cancel the grants to English-medium schools," he says. "That's my sole goal."

At the Calangute and Baga beaches, popular among Indian tourists, now sculptures of fishermen symbolise local culture. The idea came from Calangute MLA Michael Lobo, who has become the BJP's young Christian face in the last five years. Lobo, 40, was a panchayat head from the Congress in 2012. Now, the BJP points to him whenever it faces questions about the state's 27 per cent Christian voters. "I am working towards fulfilling Manohar Parrikar's dream of a developed Goa," says Lobo.

EX-RSS GOA CHIEF VELINGKAR HAS LAUNCHED A POLITICAL PARTY, WHICH IS BENT ON TARGETING THE BJP

Elvis Gomes, a Goa government employee, was peeved when the state government in 2014 recommended two of his juniors for induction into the Indian Administrative Service. Though Gomes won a ruling against his juniors' elevation from the Bombay High Court, he eventually joined the AAP and was unanimously chosen as its chief ministerial candidate.

Gomes, 52, says the government machinery in Goa has become unproductive since the staff is currently "overworked". He is all for non-polluting industries and arresting the flow of migrants to the state. The AAP's backing for grants to English-medium schools is likely to attract Christian voters, but that also means Gomes may find it hard to please some of the majority Hindu voters.

PARVEEN NEGI

^ **SWEET TOOTH** Ex-CM Vijay Bahuguna when he had crossed over to the BJP with eight other rebel Congress leaders. Most of them have now got party tickets

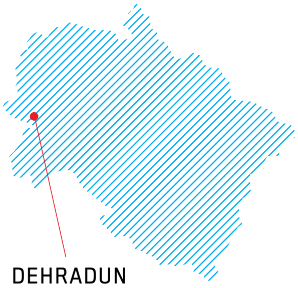
UTTARAKHAND

All in the Family

The BJP bypasses party principles to make room for ex-Congressmen and leaders' kin

By Santosh Kumar

In Uttarakhand, the 2017 election has become one where dissidence rules. Even a party like the BJP which likes to flaunt its *chaal, charitra, chehra* (character and image, as the party slogan goes) has had to kowtow to it. Of the 70 seats in the state assembly, the BJP has given 13 tickets to Congress rebels who crossed over.



The party has given tickets to all the 10 Congress rebels who were involved in trying to destabilise the Harish Rawat government last year, including Saurabh Bahuguna (son of former chief minister Vijay Bahuguna) from Sitarganj. In addition to this, Satpal Maharaj, who joined the BJP during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, gets a ticket from Chaubhattakhal.

The laudable aim, of being a party which does not promote dynastic rule, too, has been thrown to the winds. So former chief minister and retired general B.C. Khanduri's daughter Ritu gets a ticket from Yamkeshwar, senior state leader Munna Singh Chouhan gets a ticket for himself from Vikasnagar and one for wife Madhu Chouhan from Chakrata. In Devaprayag, former minister Matwar Khandari's nephew Vinod Khandari is to fly the saffron flag. In Dhanaulti, Union minister Rajnath Singh's daughter's father-in-law Narayan Singh Rana gets a ticket. There's also another first for the BJP, father-son duo

Yashpal Arya and Sanjeev Arya, who recently crossed over from the Congress, both get tickets.

Even before ticket distribution, the state BJP was on edge, but after surrendering more than 20 per cent of the tickets to erstwhile Congressmen, it is inevitable that the 'disciplined' cadre is feeling a little disgruntled. As one BJP leader who missed out put it, "The party has become a parody of the Congress in the state. We have not only given tickets to defectors, we are now also promoting dynastic politics. This was never part of the DNA of the saffron brigade."

The party's central leadership is also worried as it is facing trouble in at least half a dozen seats. In Chaubhattakhal, for instance, where Maharaj has been fielded, former state president and sitting MLA Teerath Singh Rawat has gone into a massive sulk. The party has dissuaded him from contesting as an independent, but there are still worries about sabotage. The party is trying its best to quell rebellion in the ranks but it's an open secret that the cadre, and significantly even the RSS, is unhappy with the ticket distribution in the hill state.

WITH 20% TICKETS GOING TO FORMER CONGRESSMEN, THE BJP CADRE ARE A TAD DISGRUNTLED

The Congress, meanwhile, is grappling with its own share of troubles. With few leaders of stature left in the party, Chief Minister Rawat is leading a one-man battle against the saffron forces. To make up for the losses, he has poached half a dozen dissidents from the BJP and given them tickets. The party has also managed to pull one over the BJP on the 'dynasty' issue. No tickets have been given to family members of leaders.

INDEX

Does prohibition reduce crime?

The belief that prohibition bears a direct and inverse relationship to crime is contestable

Bihar banned liquor in April 2016...

...but cognisable crimes went up month-on-month from **14,279 in April** to **16,065 in July** and **16,153 in October**

However, for **Apr-Oct 2016,** these crimes were down **7.6% to 112,596** compared with **121,817** in the same period a year ago

Kerala banned liquor in August 2014...

...but post-ban (in 2015), it had the **highest crime rate**–**723 cases** (per lakh population); all-India average was **234**

Some prohibition states have lower crime rates

Gujarat had a crime rate of **203.6** (it banned liquor in 1960), Nagaland of **55.1** (1989) and Lakshadweep of **62.5** (1979)

...but so do non-prohibition states

UP's crime rate was **112.1**, Uttarakhand **97.2**, Sikkim **119.3**, Daman & Diu **94.1** and D&N Haveli **64.4**

Source: NCRB

RANJAN RAHI

BIHAR

THE TIES THAT BIND

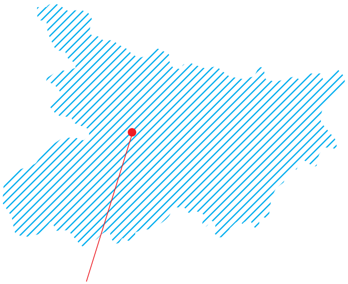
Bihar CM Nitish Kumar and RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav along with other alliance leaders become part of a massive pro-prohibition human chain at Gandhi Maidan in Patna on January 20. Despite legal hurdles and charges of schoolchildren being conscripted for the cause, it all went well

BIHAR

BOOM TIME FOR BOOTLEGGING

With huge profits to be made, liquor smuggling is soaring

By Amitabh Srivastava



The logic is simple: if there is demand, there will be supply. Which explains why Bihar's bootleggers, undeterred by the arrests of over 20,000 of them since the state's prohibition policy came into effect in April 2016, still continue with their liquor runs. Some half a million litres of smuggled liquor, worth over Rs 40 crore, has been seized so far. Even demonetisation has failed to put the brakes on the lucrative trade. When the cash dried up, liquor dealers shifted to digital payments. Last week, police in Rohtas arrested bootleggers who had transferred Rs 40,000-50,000 in salaries to the bank accounts of their 'home-delivery' staff. Satya Kumar and Shankar Sharma, members of a gang active in Dehri, some 150 km from Patna, had given 'jobs' to 10 men who had motorbikes. Early in the morning, they would deliver liquor smuggled from Jharkhand to clients. By their own admission, the duo used to make Rs 15-20 lakh a month. Less surprising when you know that liquor in Bihar now sells at four times the price it does in Jharkhand. One of the largest seizures was on January 15 when Bihar's Special Task Force entered Jharkhand's border district of Koderma and stopped a truckload (1,500 cases) of whiskey and rum.

The National Health Survey (2010-11) says 9.5 per cent of Bihar's population over the age of 15 consumes alcohol—at least 4.4 million people. The de-addiction centres set up by the Nitish Kumar government in the districts have seen less than 10,000 takers. That 22 of Bihar's 38 districts border UP, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Nepal compounds the problem. Keeping the state 'dry' is a daunting task.

MADHYA PRADESH

A Hawala Humdinger

By Rahul Noronha

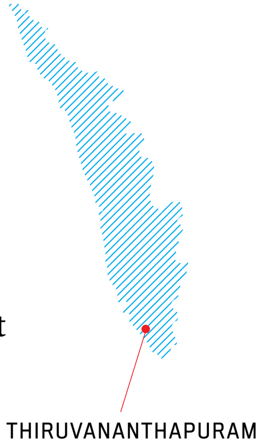
It all began with a protest on January 10 against the transfer of the SP of Katni, a small town about 400 km from the capital. Gaurav Tiwari was allegedy shifted out as he was investigating a 'hawala' scandal and was about to arrest certain people close to the new minister for small and medium enterprises Sanjay Pathak (*in pic*), the three-term Katni MLA who had recently defected to the BJP from the Congress. Two days later, the Congress and AAP had jumped in with a bandh call. The agitation soon spread to Bhopal.

Within a week, the transfer issue receded to the background as calls for Pathak's resignation grew to a chorus. But what makes Pathak a party asset in the first place? Why was the turncoat immediately made a minister? Well, for one, his business empire has seen a meteoric rise in the last decade, contributing to his financial muscle which in turn is an important asset in politics. In Katni, Pathak is seen as a saviour of the poor. He himself admits that it's the business that helps him in politics, "since I am able to help so many people". But will it help him weather the political storm ahead? Outside of Katni, there's not much going for him. Public perception is still with the 'wronged' SP. In fact, there's even talk of Bollywood making a film on the episode.

PANKAJ TIWAWRI

KERALA

THE TAPS RUN DRY



The state is witnessing the onset of what may be the worst drought in decades

By Jeemon Jacob

'God's own country' may well be headed for its driest spell in decades. Bright sunny days and chilly nights through the winter after an extremely weak monsoon across Kerala in 2016 have all the makings of a severe drought. Farmers and plantation owners, indeed even the local populace, everyone's bracing for the predicted calamity.

Acknowledging the crisis after the meteorological centre at Thiruvananthapuram issued a warning based on southwest monsoon rainfall data for 2016, the Pinarayi Vijayan government has set up a centralised war room after declaring all 14 districts as 'drought affected'.

S. Sudevan, director of the Thiruvananthapuram met centre, says the situation is turning critical. According to him, 2016 saw a mere 103

36

PER CENT

Water levels in Kerala's dams now, compared to 62% in Jan '16

BONE DRY Pantha, one of the catchment areas of the Neyyar dam in Thiruvananthapuram, was full just months ago. Today, it's all dried up

THE SHARP DECLINE IN GROUNDWATER LEVELS INDICATES A SERIOUS DRINKING WATER CRISIS IN THE SUMMER

cm of rain against the annual average of 289 cm. "There was a shortage of 61.7 per cent rainfall," he says.

Deficient precipitation has resulted in most of the state's rivers running dry. Concomitantly, there is a sharp decline in groundwater level with wells in rural Kerala dangerously close to going dry, indicating a serious drinking water crisis in the approaching summer.

George J. Mathew, a pepper and cardamom planter from Kootickal in Kottayam district, says another drought would completely destroy his plantation. "The cardamom and pepper plants will wither away," he says, cringing visibly at what he sees as "imminent doom".

Kerala's agriculture minister, V.S Sunilkumar, is already feeling the heat. Acknowledging the threat, his department is setting up special cells to chalk up strategies to face the crisis. He is also hoping that Delhi will pitch in. "We will seek the support of the Union government," he says.

Kerala's rural economy, already reeling from the November 8 demonetisation move, is full of foreboding today. Already, many in the state believe the state government is not doing enough to meet the threat. K. Krishnankutty, the Janata Dal (Secular) legislator from Chittur in Palakad district and part of Kerala's ruling Left Front, says the Pinarayi government has left things too late. The 72-year-old MLA, who also heads the Chittur area farmers' collective society , points to ominous signs. "Bharathapuzha, the state's longest river, has already dried up," he says, adding that a continuing deficiency in the winter and pre-monsoonal rains would not only result in large-scale crop losses but also spark off an acute drinking water crisis in the state.

It will also adversely impact power generation in the state, for most reservoirs are now at 36 per cent of storage capacity (compared to 62 per cent this time last January). The way things are headed, 2017 could well be the most challenging of chief minister Pinarayi's maiden tenure.

RAJASTHAN

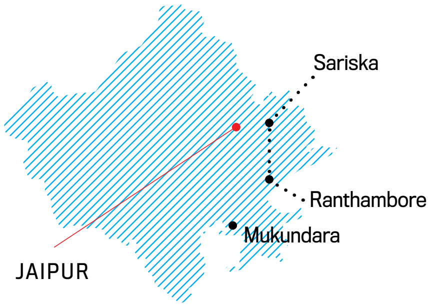
A New Haven for Tigers

By Rohit Parihar

After Ranthambore and Sariska, Rajasthan may get a third tiger reserve. The Mukundara Hills National Park has been in the works since 2003, but was notified only in 2013, shortly before Vasundhara Raje became chief minister. Now she has asked the finance and forest and wildlife departments to prepare the budget and modalities of resettling 1,600 families in forest land outside Kota. It will take Rs 160 crore and the consent of the families for that to happen. No easy task, as Sariska has shown.

780
SQ. KM
Total area of Mukundara national park, of which 418 sq. km is core area

Some 780 sq km in area, the Mukundara Hills National Park is spread across Rajasthan's Kota, Bundi, Chittorgarh and Jhalawar districts, and comprises the Durrah, Jawaharsagar and Chambal sanctuaries. The CM is encouraged by Sariska's success, where eight big cats from Ranthambore were successfully translocated after poachers had wiped out the original population. Ranthambore itself is under pressure, as instead of the normal one-third male population, its 55-60 tigers have an equal ratio of male to female tigers, leading to fierce territorial conflicts, and tigers straying into village areas. Should Mukundara be declared a tiger reserve, it can take 12 animals, easing some of the pressure.



ON THE MONEY

A referendum on his move to demonetise currency, the INDIA TODAY-Karvy Insights survey gives Narendra Modi a ringing endorsement. But it also warns the PM about the lack of jobs and inflation **By Raj Chengappa**

360

NUMBER OF SEATS NDA IS PROJECTED TO WIN OUT OF A TOTAL OF 543 SEATS

LET'S BEGIN WITH what Narendra Modi is not. Whatever his opponents may say, the prime minister is not impetuous or hasty in any of his actions. Nor is he a gambler ever willing to risk all on a hunch and a prayer.

Then let's look at what Modi is. Those who know him well and work with him closely say the man is a doer. He is a tough task master. He is open to ideas. His critics call him authoritarian, but ministers and bureaucrats who have dealt with him on issues beg to disagree with them. They say the prime minister is curious, asks pertinent questions and is ever willing to consider their suggestions. He has a strong sense of wanting to do the

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

right thing and working out the rationale for a decision.

However, once Modi is convinced, he is decisive and exhibits courage, toughness and resilience to implement his ideas. His sense of timing has so far been impeccable. For Modi, there are no half measures. Or full stops. Another piece of advice: Never take him lightly—he means what he says.

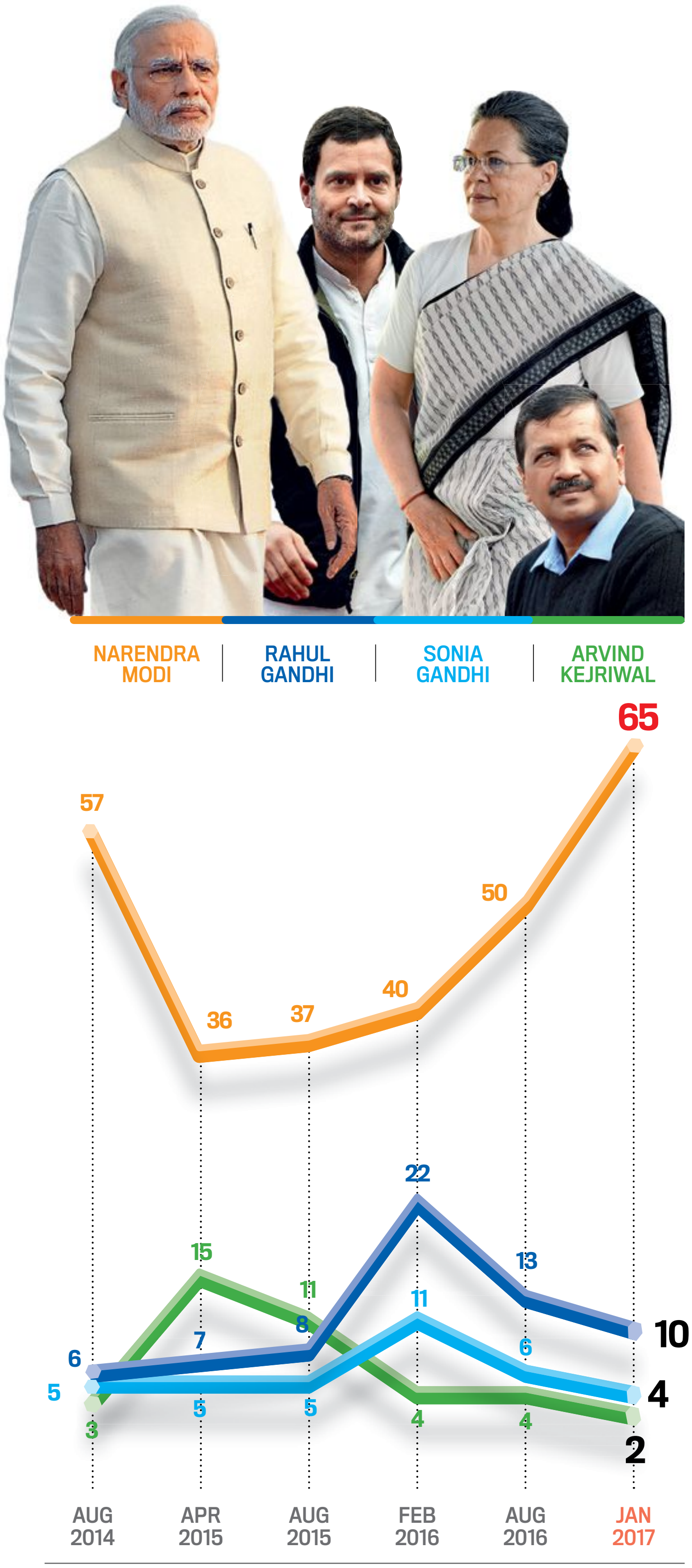
The latest INDIA TODAY-Karvy Insights Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll vindicates this assessment of the prime minister. If in the August 2016 MOTN, Modi's fortunes showed a mild upswing after the NDA's seat forecasts had fallen precipitously in two consecutive MOTN polls, the January 2017 survey results bring glad tidings for the prime minister. It is the first major opinion poll since demonetisation, and voters have given Modi an unambiguous thumbs up. Were an election held today, the NDA would get 360 seats—a substantial gain of 56 seats over the survey done in August. What is more, the BJP tally alone would bring in 305 seats, giving it a comfortable majority in the Lok Sabha and making it less dependent on its allies (*see accompanying charts*).

Modi's popularity ratings have also shown a remarkable surge: 65 per cent see him as best suited to be prime minister, up by 15 percentage points since August and way ahead of his nearest rival Rahul Gandhi who polled just 10 per cent of the votes. And the percentage of people who rated his performance as good to outstanding rose to 69 as compared to 53 per cent six months ago. Such is the rise that Modi for the first time since he assumed office in 2014 is rated as the best prime minister the country has had, scoring an even higher percentage of votes in his favour than two of the most popular former prime ministers, Indira Gandhi and Atal Behari Vajpayee.

LAST AUGUST, when Modi had bounced back in the reckoning, the reasons were clear: he had formulated a *dhoti-kurta* budget that was pro-poor and pro-farmer even while being supportive of business—a fine balancing act. He had effected a reshuffle of his team which sent a signal that he was unafraid to crack the whip. He had also successfully piloted the Goods and Services Tax (GST) bill through both houses of Parliament showing a new face of accommodation to the Opposition.

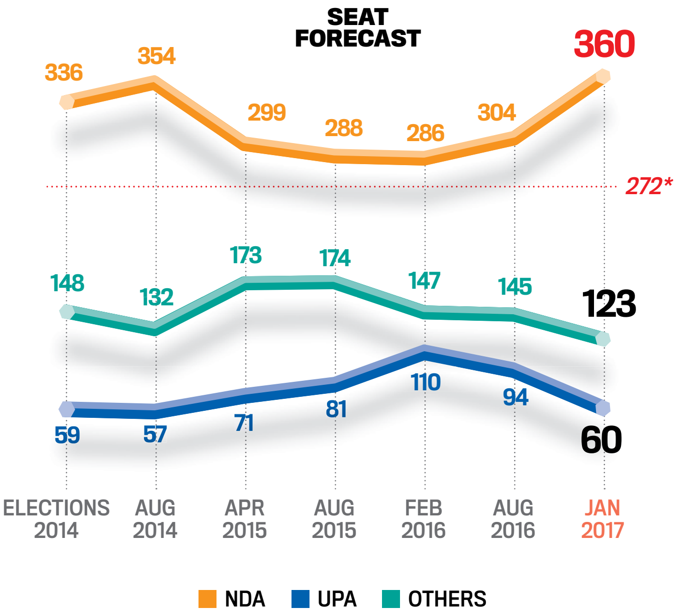
Since the August poll, Modi has made two major moves: one on the foreign policy front when in the last week of September he ordered surgical strikes

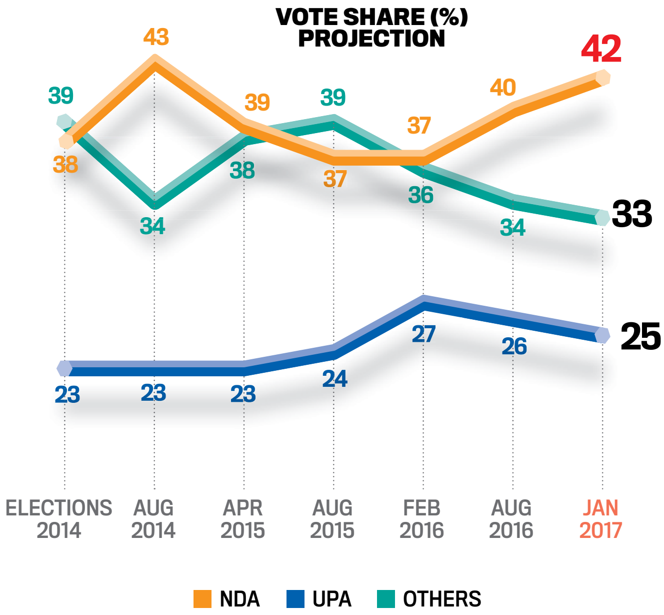
WHO IS BEST SUITED TO BE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA?



All figures in per cent

WERE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS TO BE HELD TODAY, WHICH COALITION WILL YOU VOTE FOR?





**272, majority mark in the Lok Sabha*

deep inside Pakistan-occupied Kashmir to warn Pakistan against abetting terror attacks. And then in November he exploded the demonetisation bomb that sent shockwaves across India and the world. The Opposition decried demonetisation as catastrophic to the economy. But Modi remained steadfast in his resolve and maintained that the people of India—the *sava crore deshvasis* (125 crore citizens)—were backing him to the hilt.

Modi's faith in the Indian people stands vindicated in the latest MOTN. As many as 45 per cent believe that demonetisation will help curb black money while another 35 per cent feel it will help the economy. That is a solid 80 per cent who endorse his demonetisation move. This, despite 55 per cent feeling that the government could have planned it far better, and 51 per cent opining that demonetisation had caused more pain than gain.

What is the reason behind this paradoxical support for Modi's radical measures? Join the dots and you find that there was nothing impulsive about Modi's decision to impose demonetisation of

305

SEATS

IS THE BJP'S TALLY AS A SINGLE PARTY IN THIS SURVEY

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF PRIME MINISTER MODI'S STYLE OF FUNCTIONING?

HE IS NOT AFRAID OF TAKING RISKS	**29**	[-]
HE IS ALL TALK, NO ACTION	**20**	[24]
HE IS PRO-POOR	**17**	[17]
HE BELIEVES IN SABKA SAATH, SABKA VIKAS	**9**	[17]
HE IS SECTARIAN AND ANTI-MINORITY	**8**	[9]
HE IS PRO-RICH	**6**	[12]
HE ADDS CHARACTER TO THE COUNTRY'S LEADERSHIP	**4**	[6]
HE IS DRIVEN BY SOCIAL MEDIA	**2**	[6]
HE IS DRIVEN BY THE RSS	**2**	[3]
HE DICTATES THINGS TO OTHERS	**1**	[3]
HE STAYS SILENT ON MAJOR ISSUES	**1**	[3]

Figures in [ ] are from the Aug 2016 MOTN high-value currency. He had come to power in 2014 vowing to curb black money and recover *kala dhan* stashed in bank accounts abroad. When he took office, his government moved swiftly to tackle black money stashed in foreign banks and followed it up with a voluntary disclosure scheme back home. He had warned those who didn't comply of the dire consequences. Those who didn't would soon regret it.

Meanwhile, Modi launched a stupendous drive to expand Jan Dhan accounts to the vast unbanked population of the country. In doing so, he was laying the foundation for the massive digital cash drive that was to follow. And then, when everyone least expected it, he unleashed the demonetisation genie in November with ostensible multiple objectives that included mopping up black money, wiping out fake currency and crippling terror financing.

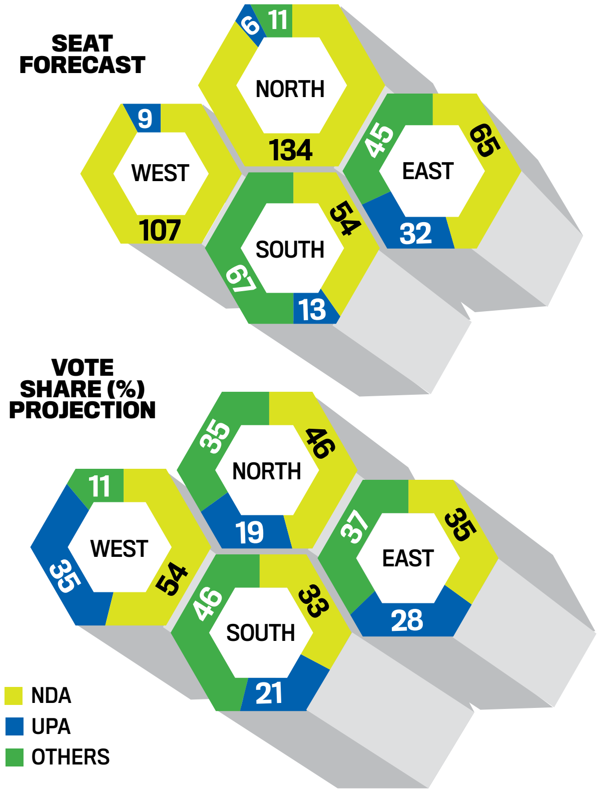
DEMONETISATION, however, was more than just an economic tool. Modi would wield it as a powerful political weapon to initiate social engineering of a scale not seen since the Mandal movement in the late 1980s. Modi had ridden to power astride a development horse, but had become acutely aware of its limited ability to mobilise the masses again. Defeats in Delhi, and then more crucially in Bihar, signalled that his magic was wearing thin. Even Hindutva agendas like *mandir* and *gau raksha* were yielding diminishing returns.

Modi and his advisors then decided to focus on issues that while ensuring national good would also get them broad-based support. Issues that went over and beyond the usual caste, religious and linguistic divides. His development agenda was one such unifying force. But now an even more powerful one would be his decision to demonetise currency in one fell swoop. It would instantly pit the rich against the poor—the classic *amir-garib* stand-off. The have-nots would see the outcome as the haves getting their comeuppance. The underprivileged would applaud demonetisation even though most of them would have to undergo harsher travails for getting cash than the well-to-do.

In Team Modi's calculus, demonetisation would enable them to appropriate the Congress's pro-poor plank and help the BJP shed its pro-merchant class image. It would also rob Arvind Kejriwal and the Aam Aadmi Party of their exclusive branding as prime crusaders against corruption. By pushing for digitisation of currency, Modi could also project himself as the great moderniser who is working towards making India a leading power of the 21st century by building on such nationalistic ideals as Make in India. His muscular approach towards Pakistan in launching surgical strikes into PoK was another demonstration of his quest to project India as a strong country and bolster his image of being a tough, no-nonsense prime minister.

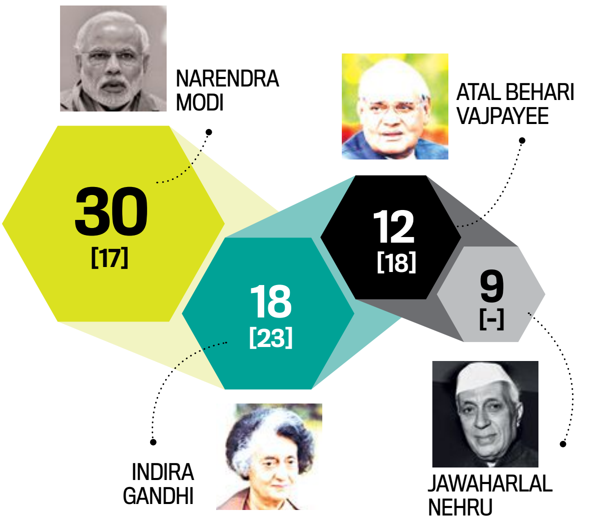
His opponents frothed at the mouth and denounced

WERE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS TO BE HELD TODAY, WHICH PARTY WILL YOU VOTE FOR? (BY REGION)

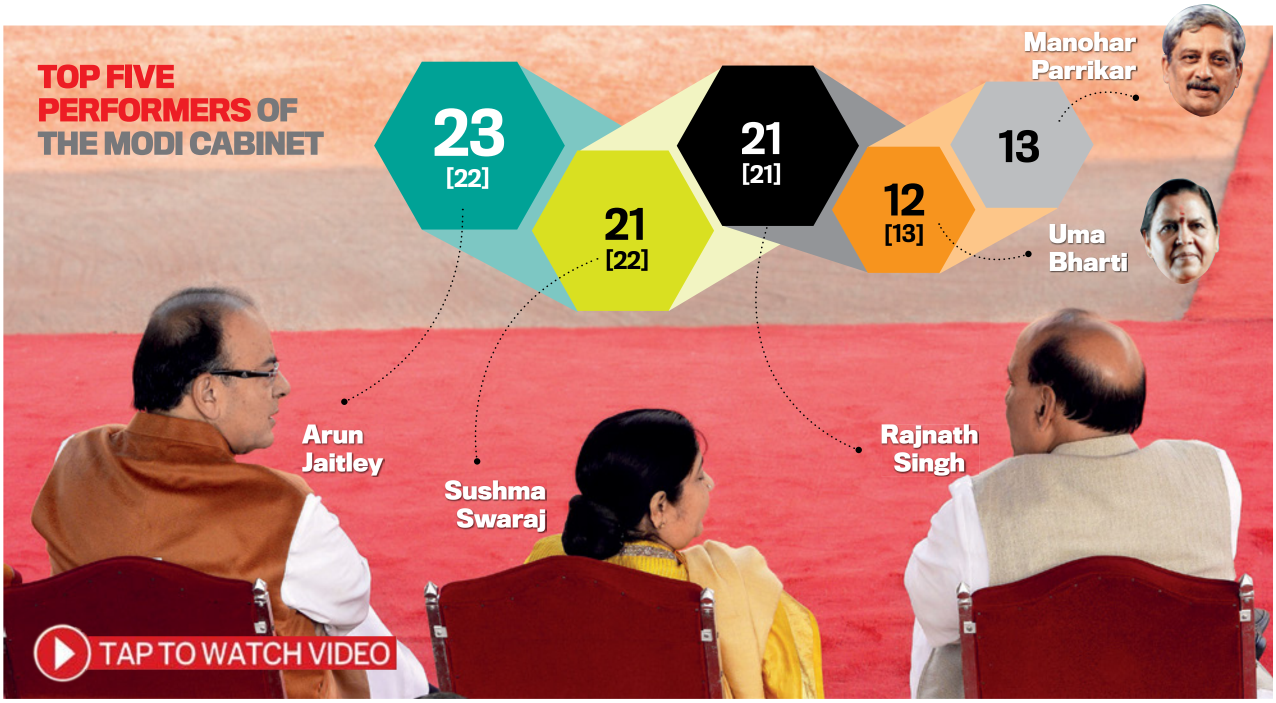


NORTH Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan; **EAST** Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal; **WEST** Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra; **SOUTH** Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana

WHO HAS BEEN THE BEST PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA SO FAR?



All figures in per cent; figures in [] are from the Aug 2016 MOTN



TOP FIVE PERFORMERS OF THE MODI CABINET

VIKRAM SHARMA

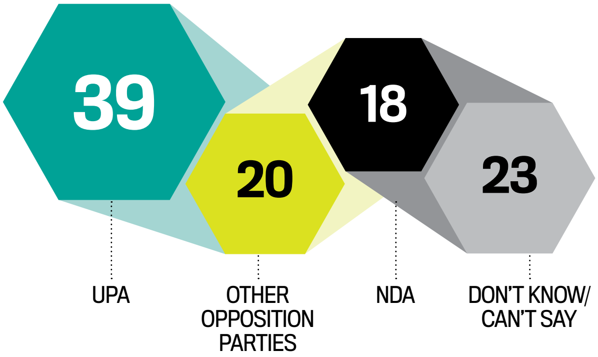
All figures in per cent; figures in [ ] are from the Aug 2016 MOTN

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SCHEMES OF THE NARENDRA MODI GOVERNMENT IS WORKING THE BEST?

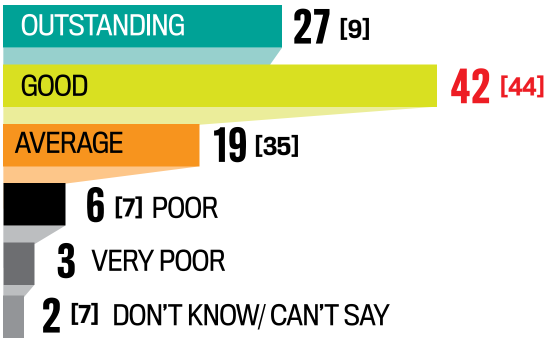
SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAAN	27
JAN DHAN YOJANA	16
DIGITAL INDIA	12
DEMONETISATION	9
MAKE IN INDIA	7
RETRIEVING BLACK MONEY FROM ABROAD	5
FASAL BIMA YOJANA	3
SKILL INDIA	1
ALL OF THE ABOVE	12

demonetisation as a purely short-term political move by him to influence the outcome of the crucial Uttar Pradesh assembly polls. They also predicted that apart from rendering millions in the informal sector jobless, demonetisation would cause irreversible damage to the economy. To the NDA government's credit, despite people having to wait in long queues in front of banks and facing an acute shortage of cash, there were no major incidents of violence or rioting. Modi himself remained super-cool, telling INDIA TODAY, "If you act with clarity and with the purest of motives, the results will be there for all to see." The MOTN findings are

WHO DO YOU THINK IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE STALEMATE IN PARLIAMENT?



HOW DO YOU RATE NARENDRA MODI'S PERFORMANCE AS PRIME MINISTER?



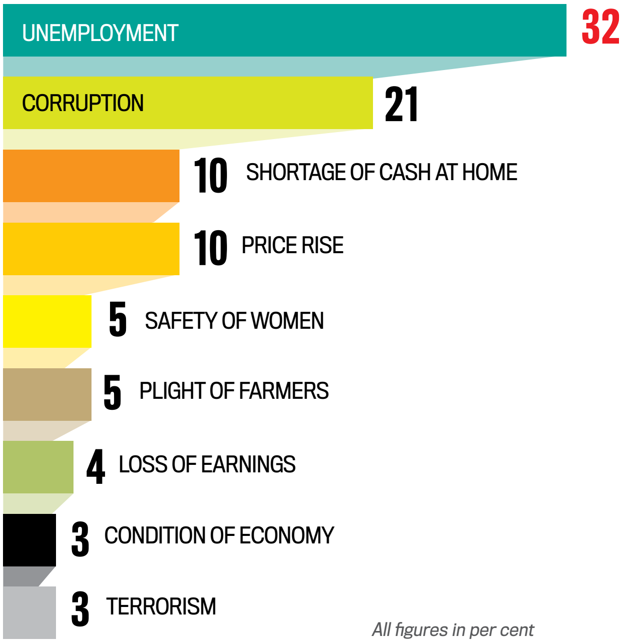
All figures in per cent; figures in [ ] Aug 2016 MOTN projections

WHICH PARTY IS MOST CONCERNED ABOUT THE PROBLEMS OF THE POOR AND THE UNEMPLOYED?

BJP	**58**	[40]
CONGRESS	**11**	[13]
AAM AADMI PARTY	**3**	[6]
AIADMK	**3**	[4]
TRINAMOOL	**3**	[4]
JD(U)	**0**	[2]
CPI(M)	**2**	[2]
DMK	**1**	[2]
OTHERS	**16**	[18]
NONE OF THE ABOVE	**3**	[6]
DON'T KNOW / CAN'T SAY	**2**	[3]

All figures in per cent; figures in [ ] are from the Aug 2016 MOTN

WHICH ISSUE CONCERNS YOU THE MOST?



All figures in per cent

a vindication of Modi's assessment that despite the pains they had to undergo, people wholeheartedly supported the demonetisation move. The respondents also lauded the fact that he was not afraid to take big risks.

Yet, despite the positive findings, there is no reason for Modi to be complacent. The poll reveals that unemployment and corruption remain the two issues that concern people the most. These were followed by price rise and a new phenomenon—shortage of cash. The number of people who believe that unemployment has become worse in the country since Modi took over remains a high 36 per cent. Concern about inflation shows a slight decline but is overall still very high. And people expect Modi to take more steps to curb corruption, especially among netas.

Also, there is no guarantee that Modi could win the UP assembly elections for his party on the basis of support for demonetisation. In an assembly poll, usually local issues, caste combinations and state leaders dominate. The prime minister, though, has a Union budget coming up shortly which he could use to address some of the key concerns, particularly the lack of jobs. Modi has shown that when the task is difficult and the challenges numerous, he is able to come out on top by creating new opportunities while pursuing older objectives relentlessly. Fortune, they say, favours the brave. So far, that adage holds true for Narendra Modi.

METHODOLOGY

The INDIA TODAY-Karvy Insights Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll was conducted by Karvy Insights Limited. The most comprehensive survey conducted nationwide, it is a verdict on demonetisation. A total of 12,143 interviews (53 per cent in rural and 47 per cent in urban areas) were conducted across 97 parliamentary constituencies in 194 assembly constituencies in 19 states: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Different starting points were selected in each of the assembly constituencies and a fixed number of interviews conducted at each starting point following a rigorous right hand rule of household selection.

The fieldwork for the Mood of the Nation poll was conducted between December 30, 2016 and January 9, 2017. All interviews were carried out face to face using a standard structured interview schedule/ questionnaire, which was translated into regional languages.

The poll was conducted under the supervision of Ranjit Chib, chairman of Karvy Insights, and he was assisted by Dixit Chanana, vice-president of Karvy Insights.

10:24
13:53
8:06
B
A
32°

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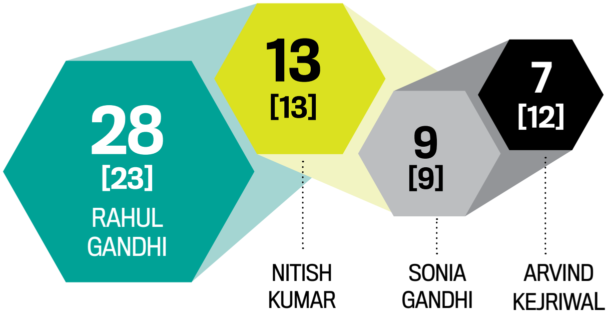
AGE OF THE GRA

TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

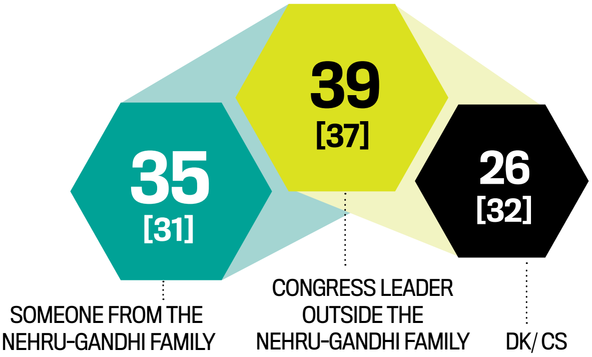
HINDUSTAN TIMES

WHO IN YOUR OPINION IS THE BEST ALTERNATIVE TO NARENDRA MODI AND CAN CHALLENGE HIM SUCCESSFULLY IN 2019?



All figures in per cent; figures in [ ] are Aug 2016 MOTN projections

WHO DO YOU THINK CAN REVIVE THE CONGRESS?



All figures in per cent; figures in [ ] Aug 2016 MOTN projections

ND ALLIANCE?

YOUNG INDIA
Rahul Gandhi with Akhilesh Yadav and Jyotiraditya Scindia

Only a broad coalition of parties, including the Congress, can challenge the NDA in 2019, the MOTN survey suggests. But who gets to lead the march?

By Ajit Kumar Jha

EVER SINCE 1977, Indian democracy has alternated between single-party dominance and a grand alliance among several parties. In the past, the Congress was the dominant party; since May 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party has assumed that mantle. In the states, the trend of grand alliances had set in much earlier, in 1967, when the Congress lost eight out of 16 assembly elections. All seven states in the north and Tamil Nadu in the south experimented with coalition governments and ideologically broad alliances, which may have been fragile, temporary and tenuous but at the same time were much more representative of the voters.

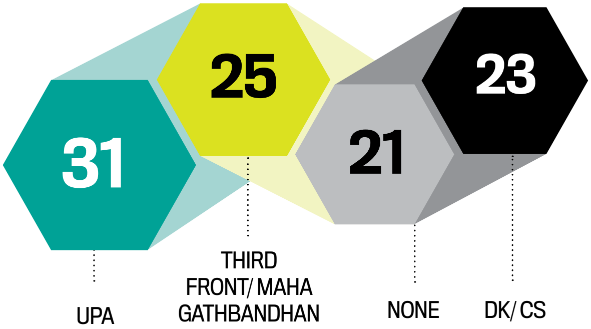
By 1977, Indira Gandhi's draconian Emergency and the JP movement culminated in the emergence of the Janata Party, a grand alliance of ideologically polar opposites, from the Jan Sangh to the Left Front. Jayaprakash Narayan became the messiah of the anti-Congress Opposition. Based on the 1977 template, VishwanathPratap Singh carried out another transient experiment of a grand alliance against the Rajiv Gandhi government in 1989, with the BJP and Left Front as partners. It was followed in 1996 by two other minority United Front governments, led by Deve Gowda and Inder Kumar Gujral in Delhi.

By this time, the rise of regional parties and the ambitions of the state satraps made them too significant in electoral considerations for the national parties to ignore. This laid the foundation for the two major

39
PER CENT

FEEL RAHUL GANDHI'S PERFORMANCE AS THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS PARTY HAS BEEN GOOD/ OUTSTANDING

WHICH COALITION CAN SUCCESSFULLY CHALLENGE THE NDA GOVERNMENT IN 2019?



All figures in per cent

national alliances that came to characterise India's polity: the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to which bandwagons regional parties have hitched their loyalties and electoral fortunes to in the past two decades. However, while the grand alliances of yore remained fragile and failed to last a full term, the alliances in power at the Centre since 1998 have been more durable, all lasting full five-year terms. And although the Modi-led BJP had a landslide victory in 2014, it chose to remain under the NDA umbrella and contest state assembly polls where it is not in power under that banner.

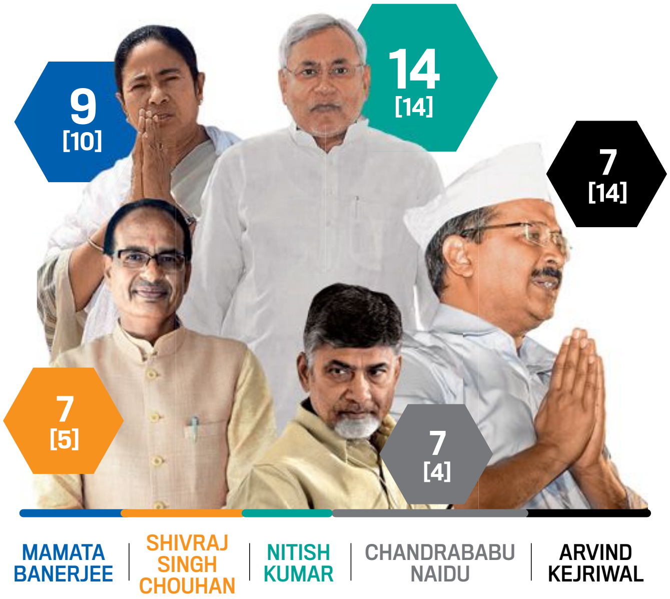
However, just when it seemed nothing could stop the march of the BJP juggernaut, the canny Lalu Prasad Yadav and Nitish Kumar got together to form a Mahagathbandhan in Bihar, the grand alliance which went on to successfully defeat the BJP in the 2015 Bihar assembly polls.

So who will win 2019? Will the NDA continue to stay strong, or will a Bihar-style *mahagathbandhan* conquer all? The results of the assembly polls in five states, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur will, of course, provide some indication. However, the INDIA TODAY-Karvy Insights Mood of the Nation survey revealsthree trends. One, Narendra Modi continues to be popular and has apparently managed to work demonetisation to his advantge as a perceived crusade for the poor. Two, the challenge from Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi may have become feebler in the past one year, but he remains his principal opponent. Three is the threat posed by the nebulous category of 'Others', which includes several political parties, as well as from the best performing chief ministers in several key states. Can they all come together to revive a JP style grand alliance at the national level and mount a formidable challenge for Narendra Modi in 2019?

39
PER CENT

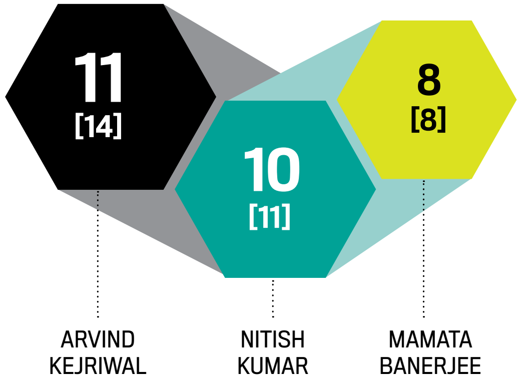
SAY SONIA GANDHI IS GOOD/ OUTSTANDING AS CONGRESS CHIEF

WHO DO YOU THINK IS THE BEST PERFORMING CHIEF MINISTER?



All figures in per cent; figures in [ ] Aug 2016 MOTN projections

WHO DO YOU THINK IS BEST SUITED TO LEAD A NON-BJP, NON-CONGRESS THIRD FRONT OR MAHAGATHBANDHAN?



All figures in per cent; figures in [ ] Aug 2016 MOTN projections

"The mahagathbandhan in Bihar under Nitish and Lalu is the best example of the revival of the grand alliance idea; both are JP acolytes who pioneered the idea of the grand alliance," says Janata Dal (United) MP Harivansh. Will the Congress, for long a single dominant party, be accommodated as the principal partner in such a grand alliance in the country? "The Congress was a partner in the 2015 mahagathbandhan in Bihar," reminds Harivansh. Can Bihar then become a template for the possible formation of a grand alliance in 2019 against the Modi-led NDA? Politics is a game of contingencies, full of surprises. Compare the situation today to that in 2004 when, according to Harivansh, "all opposition parties were scattered, with no talk of any alliance on the horizon. The NDA, led by the charismatic Atal Behari Vajpayee,and its India Shining campaign, appeared invincible. Yet, a seemingly fragile, rag-tag coalition led by Sonia Gandhi won and the Manmohan Singh-led UPA government came to power to last two full terms."

Who are the Others?

Three numbers—42, 25 and 33—represent the respective vote shares of the NDA, UPA and Others and form the kernel of our MOTN survey. It's obviously Advantage NDA, with an increase of two percentage points over the last MOTN in August 2016. The UPA's fortunes continue to plummet, the dismal 25 per cent popular vote a drop of one percentage point over the last MOTN. However, were the UPA to combine with most of the parties in the amorphous Others, the two could add up to a significant 58 per cent, turning the tide in the other direction.

IS IT POSSIBLE? The answer lies in the list of political parties under Others. The largest formations in this category include the Samajwadi Party, the Left Front, the DMK, the AIADMK, the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Trinamool Congress, Kerala Congress and several smaller parties. The Congress has successfully concluded a pre-poll alliance with the SP in Uttar Pradesh polls scheduled in February-March. Last year, it had effected alliances with the Left Front in West Bengal and the DMK in Tamil Nadu. It lost the elections in both states in 2016, but to the Trinamool and the AIADMK, not to the BJP-led NDA. The UPA government in 2004 had 335 members, with outside support from the BSP, SP, Kerala Congress and Left Front, all from the Others category in the MOTN. BSP leader Mayawati and Trinamool leader Mamata Banerjee, launched the most fierce attack against the prime minister's demonetisation move in the just-concluded winter session of Parliament in alliance with Rahul Gandhi.

The Three Best Performing Chief Ministers

While Narendra Modi, as leader of NDA, may be the most popular in the country, of the 29 state chief ministers, the three most popular—Nitish in Bihar, Mamata in Bengal and Arvind Kejriwal in Delhi—are all from non-NDA parties. Nitish got 14 per cent support across the country in the MOTN survey, Mamata 9 per cent and Kejriwal 7 per cent. Nitish's prohibition policy seems to have made him a favourite in the countryside, our MOTN poll shows a considerable 18 per cent rural vote in his support, significant given that 29 CMs are in contention. All three CMs—Nitish, Mamata and Kejriwal—have topped the MOTN popularity charts consecutively since February 2016, although Kejriwal's support has halved from 14 per cent in August 2016 to 7 per cent in 2017. The three also polled the highest number of votes when voters were asked which of them was best suited to lead the Third Front. Kejriwal scored 11 per cent votes, Nitish 10 per cent and Mamata 8 per cent.

Modi supporters may dismiss them as regional challengers to a national leadership. But then Modi himself was a regional leader who rose from being the chief minister of Gujarat to challenge and ultimately seize the central leadership.

The Rahul Redux

His popularity may have waned since the last MOTN, but when asked to rate Rahul Gandhi's performance as Congress vice-president, 39 per cent approved of it as either good or outstanding compared to 33 per cent in August 2016. Rahul again scored positively on the question of who can successfully challenge Modi in 2019: 28 per cent chose him over 23 per cent six months ago, scoring much higher than Nitish, Kejriwal or even his own mother, Congress president Sonia Gandhi. The Congress-led UPA is the bigger favourite, with 31 per cent preferring it over Third Front parties, when asked which coalition can successfully challenge the NDA in 2019.

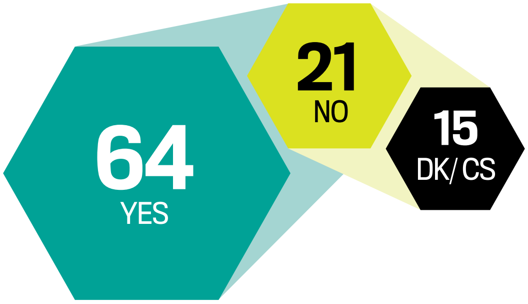
No doubt, the Modi-led NDA is on top, and with individual egos clashing and a collision more than a coalition of interests, the 2019 picture is clouded for the Opposition. If only the Rahul-led Congress were to give up its obsession with attempting a revival by going it alone and instead begin to stitch a grand alliance with the Others, a new federal front across the states and the nation, might become a real possibility, a 2004 redux in 2019.

50

PER CENT

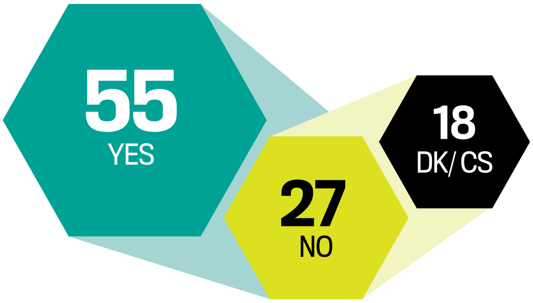
BELIEVE AMIT SHAH IS GOOD/ OUTSTANDING AS BJP PRESIDENT

DO YOU THINK THE SYSTEM OF RESERVATIONS SHOULD BE BASED ON ECONOMIC STATUS RATHER THAN CASTE?



All figures in per cent

GIVEN THE WIDESPREAD RURAL DISTRESS, ARE THE PROTESTS OVER RESERVATIONS ACROSS THE COUNTRY JUSTIFIED?



All figures in per cent

NOTE WORTHY MOVE

Despite the considerable pain, Modi's demonetisation drive has resonated with the people as a measure that will bring economic gain

By M.G. Arun

TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

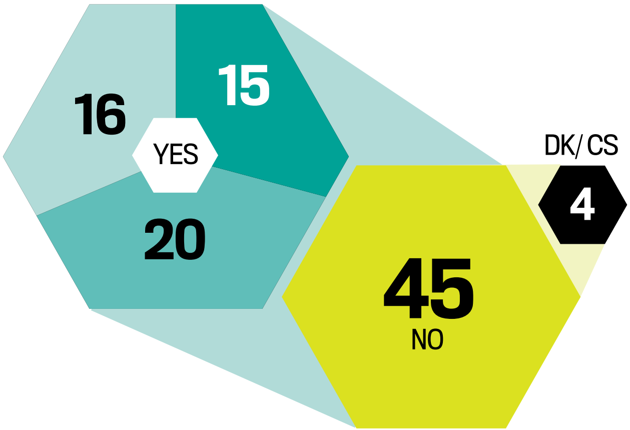
DEMONETISED!
A farmer rests on sacks of paddy at the Chandigarh wholesale grain market

NO POLICY DECISION CAST as far-reaching an impact on the Indian economy as the demonetisation of high-value currencies by the government in November last year. In an address to the nation on November 8, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes would lose their legal tender from midnight. In his words, it was supposed to be the biggest crackdown ever on black money hoarders. But the move also threatened to suck out 86 per cent of the money in circulation, with notes worth Rs 15.4 lakh crore becoming redundant overnight. That hit several business sectors hard, especially the informal sector that provides jobs to over 80 per cent of the population.

Conservative estimates suggest the economy will slow down by 1 percentage point (Crisil says India's GDP growth for 2016-17 will drop from the earlier estimated 7.6 per cent to 6.6 per cent). Data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) predicts a 1.6 percentage point fall in GDP growth. The economic pain is over and above the other hardships from the cash crunch, which saw serpentine queues of people at banks to deposit or exchange old notes and at ATMs to withdraw money.

Despite all the pain it brought, Modi seems to have made big gains with the demonetisation move. The medium-term benefit is the inroads he has made among the

DO YOU THINK DEMONETISATION HAS CAUSED MORE PAIN THAN GAIN FOR THE MASSES?



■ Yes, with long queues in banks, shortage of cash and over a hundred deaths

▨ Yes, it has destroyed small businesses and led to loss of jobs

□ Both

All figures in per cent; DK/ CS: Don't know, Can't say

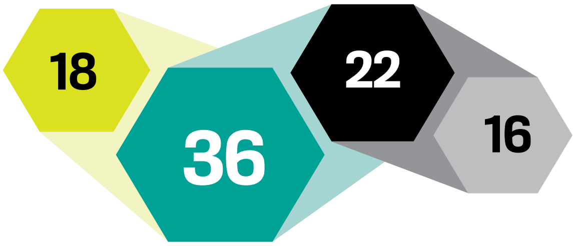
REUTERS

electorate in the five states going to polls in February and March. The Mood of the Nation (MOTN) survey makes this clear. While 45 per cent respondents believe that demonetisation will help curb black money and corruption, another 35 per cent feel it will have a positive impact on the economy. Only 7 per cent think it is a move to cripple the BJP's rivals in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and other states ahead of the assembly elections, blunting the Opposition's arguments to that effect.

At the same time, 56 per cent said demonetisation has made the Modi government popular and will help it win the state elections. Only 28 per cent felt the opposite. This is interesting since Uttar Pradesh has seen one of the largest exoduses of workers from cities back to their villages after losing jobs post-demonetisation. To a question whether demonetisation has caused the common man more pain than gain, 20 per cent respondents agreed it has destroyed small businesses and led to job losses. IndiaSpend, a not-for-profit body, estimates that 482 million people earning cash incomes will be affected by the currency ban. Economist Gurcharan Das says that for every 1 percentage point drop in the GDP, the economy would lose around 6 million jobs.

Overall, 51 per cent believe that demonetisation has brought more pain than gain, particularly the queues, job losses and deaths. Nonetheless, 45 per cent respondents

GIVEN YOUR EXPERIENCE OF DIGITAL PAYMENTS, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE LESS CASH ECONOMY PLAN?



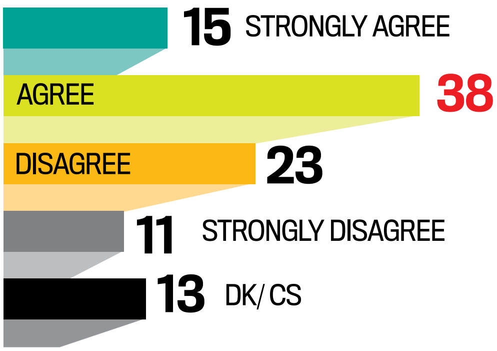
🟨 I have never made digital payments and don't think demonetisation will encourage people to do so

🟩 I have never made digital payments but think demonetisation will encourage such payments

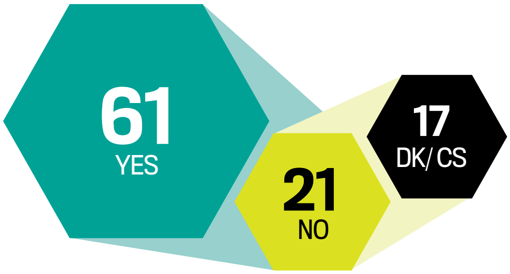
⬛ I make digital payments and think demonetisation will encourage people to do so

⬜ I make digital payments but don't think demonetisation will encourage such payments

DO YOU AGREE CONFUSION OVER DEMONETISATION HAS DENTED THE RBI'S IMAGE AND CREDIBILITY?



POST-DEMONETISATION, SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT CRACK DOWN ON POLL FUNDING TO PARTIES?



All figures in per cent

said there will be long-term gain as the move will curb corruption. In any case, Modi—in his recent pre-poll rallies—has been pegging demonetisation as a pro-poor drive since the poor have been at the receiving end of corruption.

One of the reasons the public is in no mood to criticise Modi directly for the cash crunch is because it feels that it was not the demonetisation idea but its implementation that went wrong. Not surprisingly, 51 per cent respondents in rural India and 61 per cent in the urban areas either believe the move was poorly implemented or could have been put into practice better. Most feel the Reserve Bank of India's handling of demonetisation has only undermined its credibility. With the RBI issuing 74 notifications in the initial 50 days of demonetisation, 53 per cent respondents feel the resulting confusion has dented the central bank's credibility. However, most surprisingly, not many are critical of the Modi government's changing narrative on the reasons for demonetisation—from curbing black money and funding of terrorists to making India a cashless society. In urban India, 51 per cent felt demonetisation would encourage digital payments. In rural India, 64 per cent thought the same, which is interesting, since the infrastructure for digital payments is abysmally scarce in rural areas. The message of India as a future digital economy seems to have resonated well with the rural population.

68

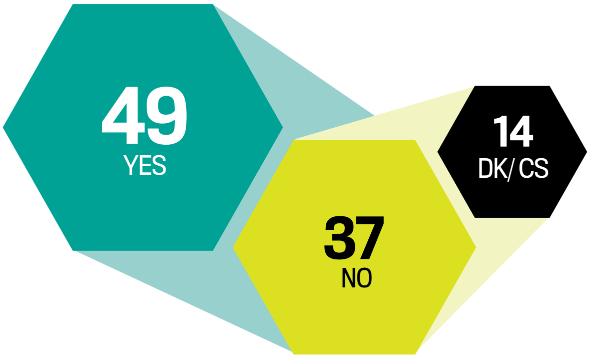
PER CENT

FEEL INCOME TAX RATES SHOULD BE LOWERED IN BUDGET 2017

What should the government do to compensate for the pain caused by disruptions following the currency ban? An overwhelming 68 per cent feel that income taxes should be lowered in the upcoming budget. The government needs to do a lot more to strengthen the public's faith in digital transactions, with 49 per cent respondents finding transactions through new modes of digital payment risky. Only 37 per cent felt that digital modes of payment are completely transparent and safe. Moreover, there is an expectation that the government will have to follow up demonetisation with more steps towards weeding out corruption. For a start, political parties need to clean up their own backyard. One major area of concern is election funding, where all national parties are equally guilty of opacity; 61 per cent wanted the government to crack down on election funding to political parties.

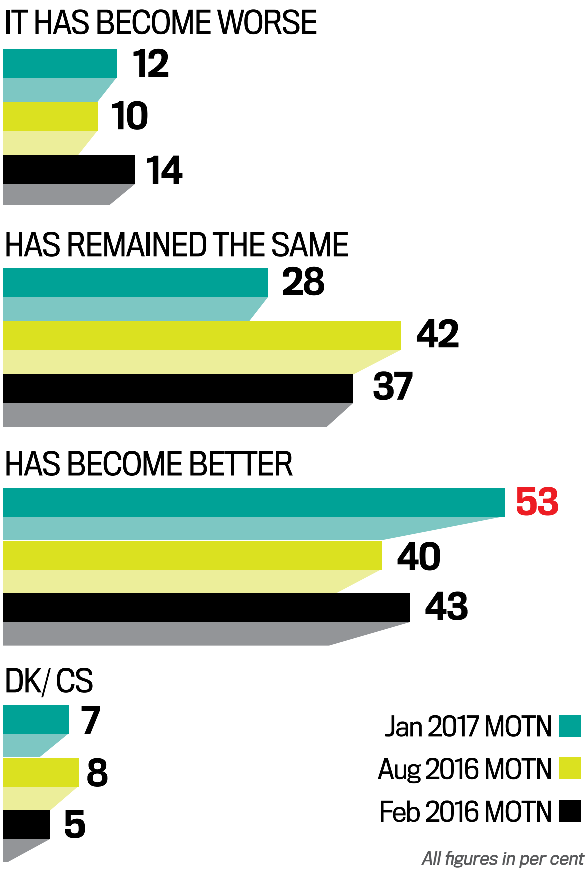
Overall, there was a sense of approval for the Modi government's policies, with 60 per cent saying they are

WITH CYBER CRIME ON THE RISE, DO YOU THINK IT IS RISKY TO USE DIGITAL PAYMENT MODES SUCH AS DEBIT CARDS, CREDIT CARDS, MOBILE WALLETS ETC.?



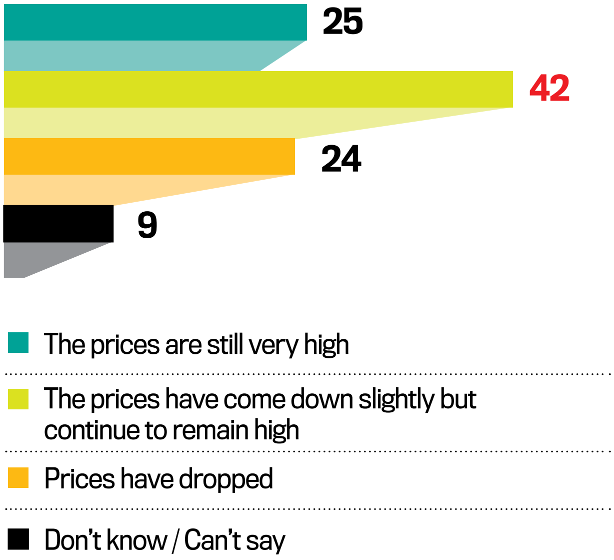
All figures in per cent

HAS YOUR ECONOMIC STATUS CHANGED UNDER THE NARENDRA MODI-LED NDA GOVERNMENT?

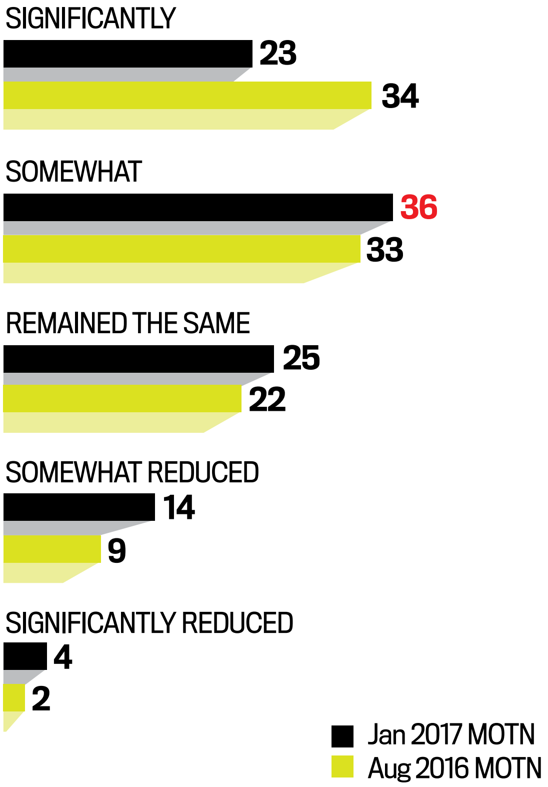


All figures in per cent

DO YOU FEEL PROPERTY PRICES IN INDIA ARE STILL VERY HIGH DESPITE THE SLUMP IN THE MARKET IN THE PAST TWO AND A HALF YEARS?



HAS INFLATION (PRICES OF DAILY ESSENTIALS LIKE VEGETABLES, DAL, RICE) RISEN UNDER THE MODI GOVERNMENT?



doing better than the previous Manmohan Singh-led UPA government—an increase of 5 percentage points since the August 2016 MOTN survey and a significant 13 percentage points since February 2016.

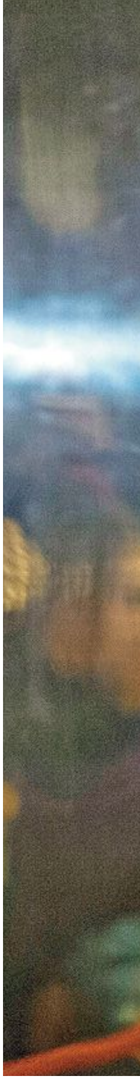
This is really surprising as a big segment of the respondents (59 per cent) agrees that inflation has been high since the NDA came to power and the job situation continues to be alarming (36 per cent believe there are no new jobs and unemployment has become worse under the present government, an increase of 1 percentage point over the previous survey and 4 percentage points since the February 2016 MOTN). Across all the four regions, respondents said the job situation has turned bad, with only 26 per cent saying it has improved moderately. More respondents in the north and south said the job situation has taken a turn for the worse.

So what is it that still makes people feel that Prime Minister Modi has performed an economic miracle? One could be that inflation, which could have spiralled, was contained at around 5 per cent over the past two years, on the back on falling crude oil prices. The other is the consensus among states on GST, reached under Union finance minister Arun Jaitley, which has reassured many that the big indirect tax reform will be effective from July this year. The third, of course, is demonetisation, coupled with a perception that the present government has done better than the previous one in checking corruption in high places. Little wonder then that 53 per cent respondents say that their economic condition has improved under Modi, compared to 40 per cent in the August 2016 survey and 43 per cent in February 2016. A higher number of Hindus and residents of states in the country's east and the west said their economic condition has improved under Modi. But despite the positive perception, a good number of respondents (67 per cent) believes that property prices are still high and out of the average buyer's reach. The real estate sector was expected to go through a major transition, both due to new regulations—the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act—put in place to make the sector more transparent and consumer-friendly as well as demonetisation, which is expected to curb black money. However, the changes will be effected over a longer period of time. Buyers are still shying away from the sector as they expect the prices to come down further and banks to reduce interest on housing loans. Apart from this, the concerns about high inflation and scarcity of jobs show the Modi government still has much ground to cover in these areas.

53

PER CENT

SAY DEMONETISATION HAS DENTED THE IMAGE AND CREDIBILITY OF THE RBI


GETTY IMAGES

FUTURE IMPERFECT

The government gets high marks for its foreign and security policy handling. There is uncertainty, but people seem optimistic about the challenges ahead

By Sandeep Unnithan

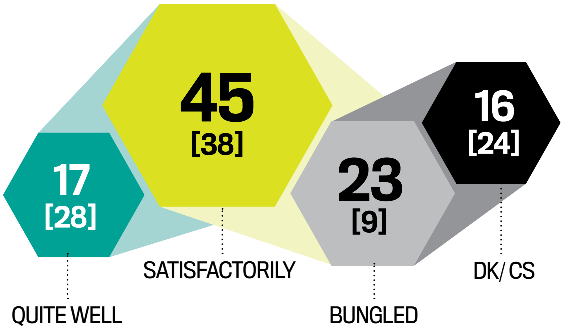
A **WEEK, AS BRITISH** prime minister Harold Wilson once observed, is a long time in politics. Six months—since the last Mood of the Nation survey in August 2016—seem like an eternity now. Consider how the global political climate has changed since then. Brexit, Britain's exit from the European Union, is now a reality; Russia has established itself in Syria and Donald Trump is the 45th president of the United States.

Closer home, Pakistani terrorists killed 19 soldiers at an army base in Uri, Kashmir, on September 18, triggering retaliatory cross-border surgical strikes by India. This also led to the country ratcheting up pressure on Pakistan, a result of which was an India-led boycott of the SAARC summit which was to be held in Islamabad last November. But while India-Pakistan relations are fairly predictable in their unpredictability, a similar situation seems to be unfolding globally.

"The world we enter in 2017 is marked by unevenness, possibilities, uncertainties, known and unknown unknowns," foreign secretary S. Jaishankar told the audience at the Raisina Dialogue on January 18. In such times of uncertainty, MOTN is a useful barometer of what people feel. Forty three per cent of respondents, for instance, feel Indo-US ties will improve under the Trump presidency. This response, of course, predated his 'buy American, hire American' inauguration speech, a statement which has ominous portents for the $150 billion Indian IT sector.

There are signs that the Indo-US strategic partnership, built on joint exercises, intelligence exchange and sales of military equipment will continue unaffected by the new president's 'America first' economic focus. Last year, India

HOW HAS THE NDA GOVERNMENT HANDLED RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN?



All figures in per cent; figures in [] are Aug 2016 MOTN projections; DK/CS: Don't know/can't say

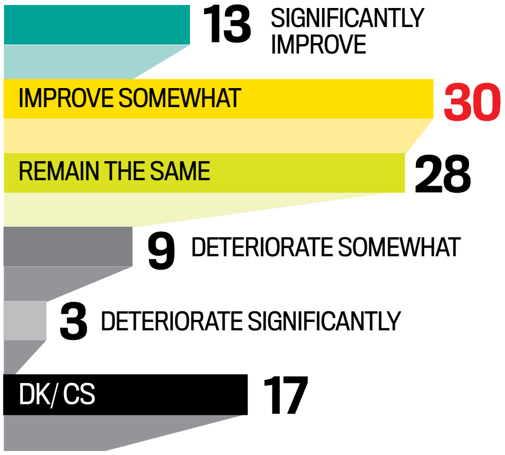
58
PER CENT

FEEL THE NDA GOVERNMENT DID THE RIGHT THING IN CONDUCTING SURGICAL STRIKES AGAINST PAKISTAN AS A RESPONSE TO THE URI ATTACK

TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

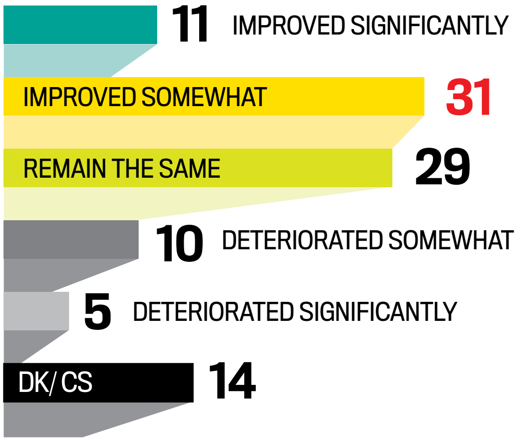
DONALD TRUMP, PRESIDENT
In an elevator at Trump Towers, a few days before his inauguration on January 20

HOW WILL INDIA-US RELATIONS FARE UNDER THE NEW AMERICAN PRESIDENT, DONALD TRUMP?



All figures in per cent

HOW HAVE INDIA'S TIES WITH CHINA CHANGED UNDER THE NARENDRA MODI GOVERNMENT?



All figures in per cent

and the US signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, agreeing to use each the other's army bases for refuelling. In December, President Barack Obama signed a defence bill designating India as a 'major defence partner'.

One of the major reasons for this growing Indo-US proximity, China continues to remain a mind-boggling conundrum. China is simultaneously India's largest trading partner and also its biggest strategic challenge. Over the past year, Beijing's unprecedented belligerence has shocked New Delhi. It has blocked moves by the Nuclear Suppliers Group to admit India into the club, and has blocked attempts to get the UN Security Council's sanctions committee to designate Masood Azhar as a global terrorist. These political differences might be seen as to have overshadowed major strides made in business and people-to-people contacts. But 42 per cent of MOTN respondents feel that India's relations with China have improved under PM Modi.

China's closest ally, Pakistan, remains the other major regional challenge for India even though 62 per cent of MOTN respondents feel the Modi government has satisfactorily handled relations with its western neighbour (but 23 per cent also felt the government has bungled, up from 9 per cent in the previous MOTN). This is primarily because Pakistan is the fount of what constitutes the greatest threat to India's internal security: terrorism. Forty-four per cent of respondents said cross-border terrorism was the number one threat to internal security. This number has gone up by seven percentage points since the last MOTN in August 2016. This increase clearly has to do with the unrest in J&K—over 230 people died because of it last year, the highest body count since 2010.

Through all this, the government's surgical strikes still got a thumbs up. Fifty-eight per cent of respondents feel it was very much required to teach Pakistan 'a lesson', a seeming vindication of the Centre's iron fist in a velvet glove approach to Islamabad.

SWACHH A LONG JOURNEY

The nation raises the red flag on air and water pollution, but says life is otherwise good under Modi

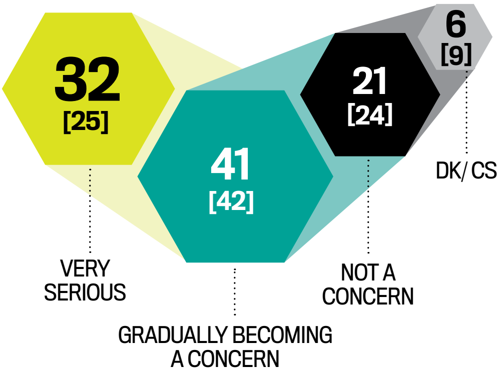
By Damayanti Datta

A DAY AFTER Prime Minister Narendra Modi kickstarted his 'purification drive' against black money, apocalyptic grey skies hung over India. Toxic smog thickened, harmful particles in the air became so dense that they could not be measured by standard instruments. About 1,400 schoolchildren sent a letter to the prime minister on November 10, asking for a National Clean Air Day. They didn't make news. But, in a way, the children chimed with the mood of the times, the collective unconscious.

Clear the toxins, go for ritual purification. That idea has always held a seductive, if not moral, fascination for India: think about the idea of karma, about yoga, about ayurveda. With the PM's relentless commitment to purge the nation—of garbage or black money—the Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll on issues affecting life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness this time around, is reflective, yet, pregnant with expectations of things to come.

In the very first MOTN survey after Prime Minister Modi took office, the popular concerns were about communalism, politics over school textbooks and the rise in sexual crimes. In 2015 and 2016, the public attention was on unemployment, price rise, episodes of corruption and communal tension. This year, however, all that seems to have fallen off the mental map. The vox pop has made its preferences known: from dirty air, polluted water, the state of hospitals and schools to law, order and justice.

HOW SERIOUS IS THE PROBLEM OF AIR AND WATER POLLUTION IN YOUR AREA?



Figures in brackets Aug 2016 MOTN projections
DK/ CS: Don't know, Can't say

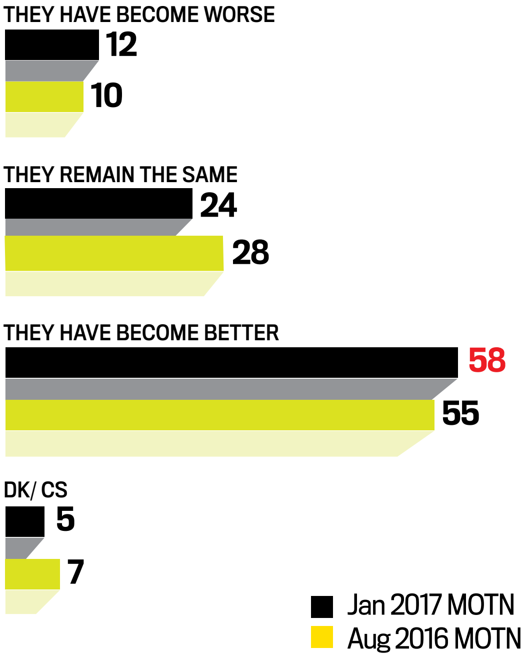
64 PER CENT

FEEL THE SUPREME COURT'S DECISION TO MAKE IT MANDATORY FOR CINEMA HALLS TO PLAY THE NATIONAL ANTHEM IS A GOOD IDEA

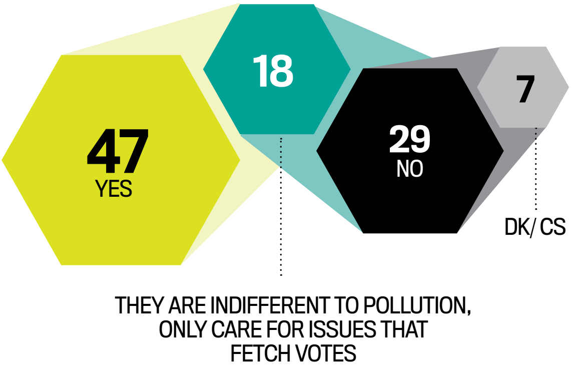
NO BREATHING SPACE
Protest against rising air pollution in the capital

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

DO YOU THINK SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES IN THE COUNTRY HAVE BECOME BETTER UNDER THE MODI GOVERNMENT?



DO YOU THINK POLITICIANS ARE IGNORING THE PROBLEM OF AIR AND WATER POLLUTION?



All figures in per cent

Seventy-three per cent of those polled believe that air and water pollution is a concern; "a very serious concern", say 32 per cent. Sixty-five per cent feel that politicians are indifferent to their plight, with about 18 per cent adding that politicians "care only for visible issues that fetch them votes". They are not off the mark: as per the World Health Organization's 'Global Burden of Disease' report in mid-November, India has overtaken China in the number of deaths due to ambient air pollution for the first time. For the first time, the average particulate matter exposure is higher for Indian citizens than for the Chinese.

But don't expect a not-going-to-take-it-anymore attitude. More than half the respondents say that their quality of life has become better, with the Centre getting credit even for services that are in the states' domain: 58 per cent believe that schools have become better under the Modi government, while 59 per cent say the same about hospitals—although much of the resounding approval comes from the BJP-ruled states in the west and east of the country. The judiciary, however, is holding its own, despite two years of corrosive battle with the government: more than judicial corruption, the respondents hold a lack of courts and judges to be the biggest hurdle faced by the justice system. And 64 per cent are upbeat about the recent Supreme Court verdict making the national anthem mandatory in movie halls.

"There's no global precedent of what India has done. People have redefined the concept of sacrifice." That's what the prime minister said on December 31, in his speech to the nation after more than 50 days of demonetisation. Call it sacrifice, ennui or confusion, but the prime minister's detox route to cleanse the body politic has worked for him. The supporters of this narrative see a new opportunity to 'purify' the system. And they look principally to the Modi government to save the day: clean country, clean currency, clean air, to begin with.

TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

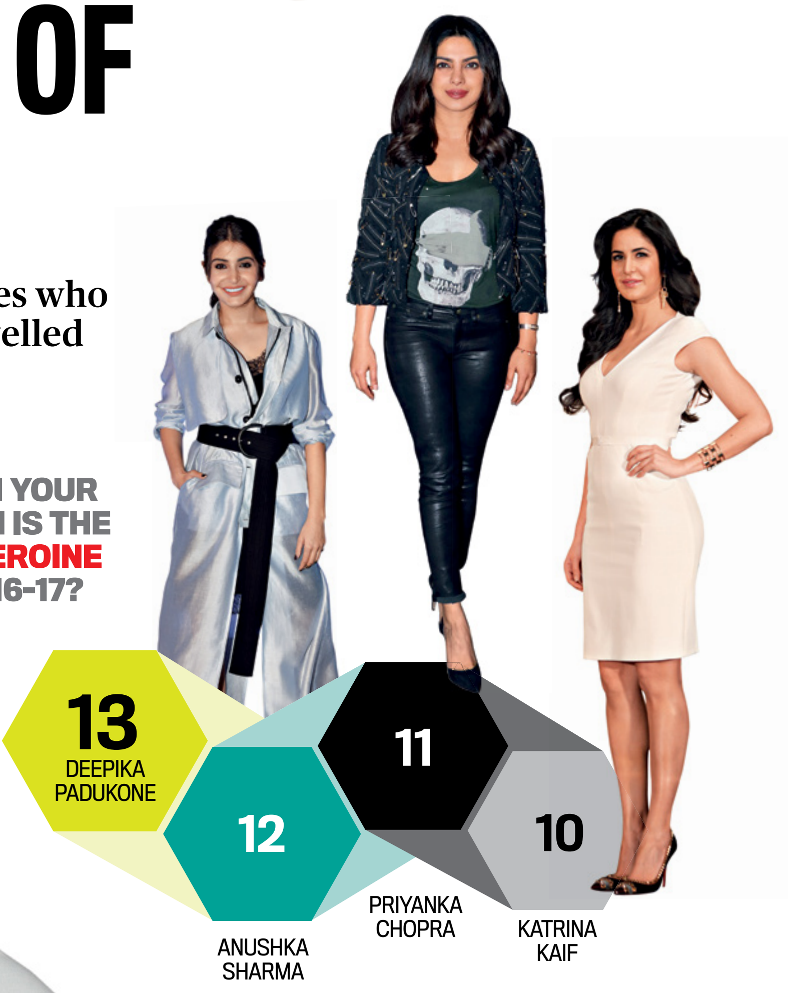
THE FAIREST OF THEM ALL

The Khans still rule, but it's the ladies who showed how far Bollywood has travelled

By Suhani Singh

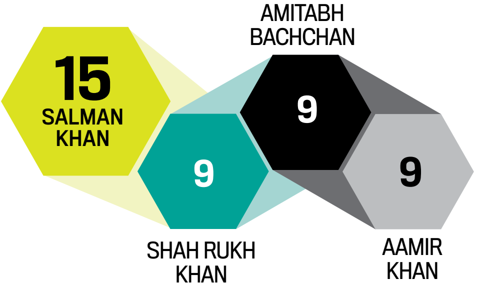
ROHIT CHAWLA

WHO IN YOUR OPINION IS THE NO. 1 HEROINE OF 2016-17?



AMIR KHAN PRODUCED and starred in sports drama *Dangal* which overcame demonetisation woes to become Hindi cinema's biggest ever hit. Yet, Mr Perfectionist Khan has a ways to go before he becomes the most popular one. That position is still held by Salman 'Bhai' Khan. Shah Rukh Khan has kept himself in contention, though his star has lost some of its sheen with some 'disappointing' shows (which in film parlance means his movies are no longer cracking the Rs 100 crore club). But then, the actor has lately demonstrated a proclivity for less-formulaic cinema (*Fan*) and isn't insecure about taking the backseat (*Dear Zindagi*) for a change. The 51-year-old trio is still ahead of much-younger peers like Ranveer Singh and Ranbir Kapoor, but their toughest competition is Akshay Kumar, who is the hero of the hour with films doused in patriotic fervour (*Airlift* and *Rustom*). India's movie-going audience isn't just rooting for the top dogs; they like the underdogs too as is evident with the presence of Nawazuddin Siddiqui on the list, after having two solo releases in

WHO DO YOU SEE AS THE **NO. 1 HERO** OF 2016-17?



All figures in per cent

Freaky Ali and *Raman Raghav 2.0*.

On the heroine front, Deepika Padukone and Priyanka Chopra were the desi girls who went pardesi, spending 2016 building careers in the US. Padukone shot her Hollywood debut *xXx: Return of Xander Cage*; Chopra was busy with season two of *Quantico* and the movie adaptation of popular TV series *Baywatch*. The box office queen of 2016, though, was Anushka Sharma with *Sultan* and *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* cumulatively earning Rs 400-plus crore in India. Lastly, the entertainment story of 2016 has been the rise of 23-year-old Alia Bhatt. The young actor may not know the who's who of the nation but when it comes to her craft she has it all figured out . With a stellar performance as a Bihari migrant who is sexually abused and addicted to heroin in *Udta Punjab*, Bhatt is the bona fide heroine to watch out for.

Show and Tell

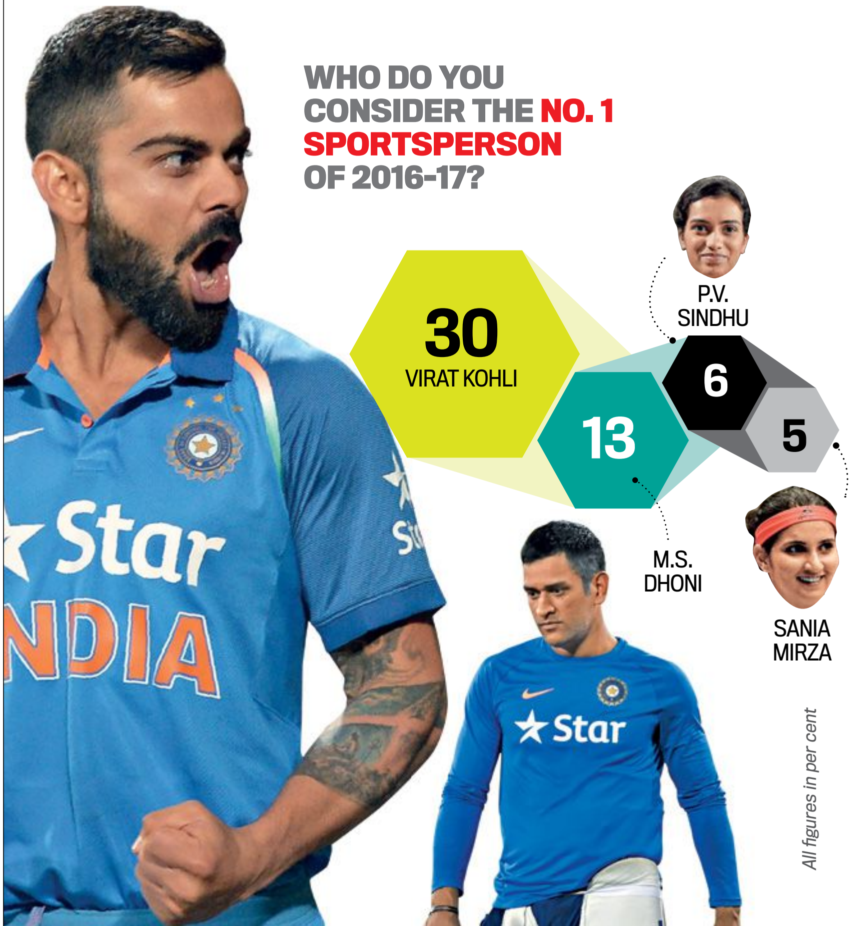
A year when merit shone through as much as grit in Indian sports

SHAME ON PEOPLE for trolling @AnushkaSharma non-stop. Have some compassion. She has always only given me positivity." The 116 characters—the most retweeted tweet of 2016—highlight that off-field too Virat Kohli leads by example, standing up for his then ex in front of misogynistic trolls. With great power, Kohli has only demonstrated greater responsibility, passion and aggression as he shoulders the hopes of a billion-plus cricket fanatics. His individual performance—he is the only batsman who is in the top 5 across ICC rankings in Test, ODI and T20—hasn't suffered despite the media glare, reaffirming that he is more than capable of multitasking. With M.S. Dhoni relinquishing the Test captaincy too, the Virat era has truly begun.

Kohli isn't the only Indian sports personality with a winner's mentality. Three women—Olympic silver medallist shuttler P.V. Sindhu and bronze-winning wrestler Sakshi Malik, along with gymnast Dipa Karmakar, who narrowly missed the podium in the vault—ensured that India had something to celebrate in what was otherwise a disappointing showing at Rio 2016. Their sacrifices and against-all-odds journeys to the big summit are a reminder that there are sporting icons beyond the world of cricket. As the poll suggests, India needs to unearth these bright stars early, support them with funds and upgraded infrastructure and protect sporting bodies from political interference. The golds will come.

– Suhani Singh

WHO DO YOU CONSIDER THE **NO. 1 SPORTSPERSON** OF 2016-17?



AFP

All figures in per cent

TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

PRABHJOT GILL

NATION | PUNJAB

DOWN TO THE WIRE

Three heavyweights slug it out in Punjab on poll-eve. The Congress and AAP gun for the Badals, accusing them of amassing personal wealth. But the incumbents remain confident of returning to power

By Asit Jolly

AMARINDER SINGH AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN AMRITSAR

THREE-WAY CONTEST

The 2014 Lok Sabha election put the AAP firmly on the Punjab voter map

45 **SHIROMANI AKALI DAL** + **BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY**

(Highest margin, 48,462 votes, in Dera Bassi; lowest margin, 704 votes, in Rampura Phul)

37 **CONGRESS**

(Highest margin, 36,957 votes, in Amritsar West; lowest margin, 356 votes, in Ajnala)

33 **AAM AADMI PARTY**

(Highest margin, 50,512 votes, in Nihalsinghwala; lowest margin, 501 votes, in Samrala)

Figures are assembly segments parties led in Lok Sabha 2014

In what would unquestionably be counted as the coldest winter of the 10-year-old Shiromani Akali Dal-BJP coalition, it is uncommonly scorching across the Punjabi hinterland—the fast approaching assembly elections raising temperatures like never before. And nowhere is this more palpable than in Lambi—the personal political bastion carefully nurtured for two decades by 89-year-old Akali patriarch and five times chief minister, Parkash Singh Badal.

Here, the countryside, freshly painted over with green wheat fields, is cloaked in an unmoving fog. Yet Arvinder Singh, a middle-aged farmer in Fatuhikhera village, says he can feel the wind gaining strength: "*Umeed ban di jaa rahi hai, ais waar kujj wakhra hovega* (hope is building... this time will be different)," he says. His confidence springs from the fortuitous arrival of former chief minister Capt. Amarinder Singh. "After a very long while, voters here (in Lambi) have the choice of two candidates of comparable stature," he says, his eyes lighting up.

But what is really signalling possibilities of change is that for the first time there is a credible three-cornered race in what had always been a bipolar face-off between the Congress and SAD-BJP. The Aam Aadmi Party that won four out of Punjab's 13 seats in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, all in the politically critical Malwa region, is in the fray. With 69 of the 117 assembly constituencies concentrated here, Malwa is the clincher in any assembly election. Every single chief minister of Punjab, with the exception of Darbara Singh, was from here. In 2014, AAP led in 31 Malwa assembly segments and was a close second in nine. It did well in assembly segments across erstwhile SAD and Congress bastions.

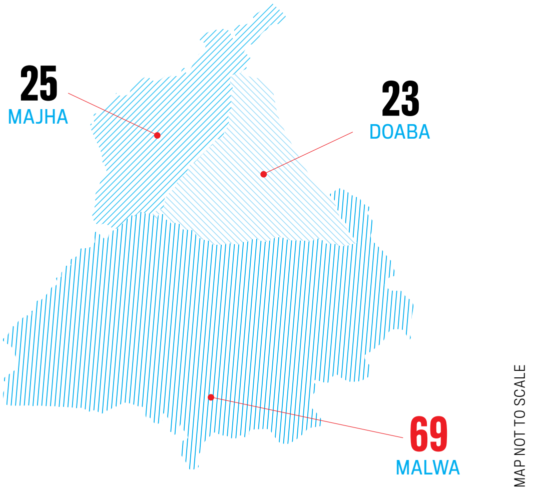
That the fledgling party could pull it off amid a countrywide wave for Narendra Modi, where people voted for it thinking it would capture power in Parliament, has made the Congress and SAD-BJP sit up and take notice. No less worrying for them is that AAP led in 14 of the 34 reserved constituencies in the state. Nearly 32 per cent of the Punjabi electorate is Scheduled Caste, dominant in 44 assembly constituencies.

Spearheading the party's campaign, AAP national convenor and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal knows Malwa will be crucial to edging past the finish line on February 4. He is pitting former Delhi MLA Jarnail Singh (whose claim to fame springs from the shoe he hurled at P. Chidambaram, finance minister in the UPA-II government) against Badal in Lambi. It may seem like David versus Goliath, but Jarnail is evidently feeding the growing indignation against

WHY MALWA MATTERS

117

TOTAL ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCIES IN PUNJAB



Malwa has the highest number of constituencies, 69 of 117

All previous CMs, except Darbara Singh, were from the 1966 Malwa region (after the 1966 Reorganisation of Punjab)

SANDEEP SAHDEV

TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

the incumbent. On January 11, a villager threw a shoe at Badal in Lambi. Since then, there have been half-a-dozen incidents—protests and angry sloganeering—at his meetings.

Both Congress and AAP are seeking to reap dividends from what they perceive as brimming public resentment against the ruling coalition, perceptions that the ruling elites—in this instance the Badal family and its cohorts—have appropriated it all, from political power to economic wealth and influence over religious institutions. The prospect of a return to power has galvanised Amarinder, spurring him from his laidback 2012 campaign style into an openly aggressive, shoot-from-the-lip combatant, spoiling for a fight with the Badals. On January 17, preparing to file his nomination papers from Patiala, he launched a broadside against the Badals: "They multiplied their personal wealth by usurping control over everything from drugs, liquor, sand mining, cable TV to public transport. All this at the cost of the people of Punjab, who have been reduced to drug addiction and penury." Upping the ante a day later, he drove through dense fog to file a second set of nomination papers—challenging Parkash Singh Badal's supremacy in Lambi. "I am determined to teach him a lesson," Amarinder told INDIA TODAY. Later, leading an impressive roadshow that would have hitherto been unthinkable in the Badal family bastion, Amarinder draws repeated applause at a rally at the spanking local sports stadium. He stays closely focused on his opponent, promising to "throw the Badals in jail" if their role in incidents of desecration of the Sikh scripture in 2015 comes to light.

The Congress and AAP are promising Punjab's voters the sky—jobs for every household, free smartphones, unemployment allowance for the youth, farm loan waivers, fatter welfare pensions, de-addiction clinics, *pind* (village) clinics like Delhi's *mohalla* clinics, government schools with swimming pools, cheaper electricity and waiver of water charges...the list is endless.

In their poll speeches, however, Amarinder and Kejriwal are singularly focused on the Badals, accusing them of everything that is wrong in Punjab, and promising to punish them. Notably, both have abandoned any criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and demonetisation. Rather, borrowing from the class narrative Modi initiated with the move, Kejriwal, too, is promising to confiscate the gains of corruption: "*Hum Badalon ke pet se bhrashtachaar ka ek ek paisa kheench kar nikal lenge...usey Punjab ki garib janta par istemaal karenge* (will extract every paisa of ill-gotten

PRABHJOT GILL

(LEFT) KEJRIWAL AT A RALLY IN DHARAMKOT, THE BADALS IN MOGA

wealth from the Badals and spend it on the poor," he tells a 3,000-strong gathering at Dharamkot.

Much of what he promises—his plans to jail Sukhbir's brother-in-law Bikram Majithia, implementing the Swaminathan Commission report on foodgrain pricing, even sending an SIT to investigate Amarinder's alleged Swiss bank accounts—would be hugely difficult if not impossible to accomplish. But after Modi's blistering Lok Sabha win in 2014 and his own stellar success in Delhi a year on, Kejriwal's learnt the value of rhetoric, or *jumlebaazi*, as some call it.

"This is a perception battle that will have to be fought to the very end," says Rishi Raj Singh, director of Indian Political Action Committee (IPAC), the 250-strong group of young professionals assisting master poll strategist Prashant Kishor in implementing carefully-crafted and targeted campaigns centred around Amarinder Singh. "The real challenge," he says, "will be to bring in 50 per cent of the voters who'll make up their minds in the last week depending on who they see forming the government."

Amarinder's unexpected foray into Lambi hopes to do exactly that—project himself as the most-likely-to-succeed challenger. As also Kejriwal's familiar spiel: "*Punjab mein is baar karishma ho raha hai...saare log kah rahe hain ki AAP ko vote denge* (Punjab is witnessing a miracle...everyone is saying they'll vote for AAP)." He is not seeking votes. In a tried-and-tested tactic from the 2015 Delhi polls, he's informing people which way everyone is voting.

But unlike in Delhi where Kejriwal was the unquestioned leader, AAP's Punjab campaign lacks a chief ministerial face. It is a touchy topic. Delhi deputy CM Manish Sisodia's oblique suggestion that Kejriwal himself would take care of Punjab provoked a storm, with rivals accusing the AAP convenor of eyeing the state and 'betraying' the mandate in Delhi. It's still a guessing game and the party has now centered its campaign around its well-known poll symbol. "*Jharoo, jharoo...jharoo nu vote dao*," is now AAP's tagline in Punjab.

So, is the anti-incumbency accumulated over their 10 years in office now ready to bring down the SAD-BJP coalition? Not if you ask Sukhbir Badal. Supremely confident in the middle of what nearly everyone else sees as impending doom, he says the "unparalleled development" achieved by his government will carry the alliance to an unprecedented third term. "We'll score a hat-trick," he says, insisting, "this is a bipolar election with the Akali-BJP on one side and the Congress and AAP on the other."

Sukhbir Badal proved convincingly in 2012 that the longest-held political trends can be bucked. Even though many young Sikhs, disenchanted with the SAD or fired by the prospect of the new-kid-on-the-block AAP, are seen as moving out of the party's hitherto unwavering, core panthik vote bank, many believe that a significant section, particularly older voters, will remain loyal. Pramod Kumar, a Chandigarh-based political scientist, says if SAD's core holds, it could end up benefitting from a division of anti-incumbency votes between the Congress and AAP. "My single biggest achievement is I've delivered on what I promised 10 years ago," Sukhbir tells voters in Jalalabad, where he faces a two-pronged challenge from AAP's Bhagwant Mann and former CM Beant Singh's grandson, Ravneet Bittu.

Somehow Sukhbir seems unaffected by Mann's full shows in Jalalabad or the talk of trouble elsewhere. "Our work will bring us back to power," he says, citing the network of new highways, abundant power, citizen services, memorials to freedom fighters, soldiers and religious leaders and more. His confidence also springs from the knowledge that over the past five years, the SAD-BJP has managed to directly benefit over 75 per cent of the 19.7 million people expected to cast their votes on February 4.

On January 24, SAD came out with a bag of poll promises that mimics and betters what rivals offer. Sukhbir's new 'Vision Document' bears the promise of more doles for every section, including sugar and ghee under the ongoing Atta-Dal scheme and CCTV in all 12,000 villages! With less than 10 days to go before polling, both Amarinder and Kejriwal hope Punjab will see winds of change blowing their way. Will they? Or will the unmoving fog stay?

SAMANYA SEVA MEDAL
1965
SIACHEN GLACIER MEDAL
SERVICE MEDAL
UCCHH TUNGTA MEDAL
LONG SERVICE
9 YEARS

RAJWANT RAWAT

THE DE-MEDALISATION OF THE FORCES

BUREAUCRATIC PARALYSIS IN THE DEFENCE MINISTRY LEAVES SOLDIERS TO BUY THEIR OWN MEDALS

By Sandeep Unnithan

In the tube-lit interiors of a private military store in Gopinath Bazaar in the heart of Delhi Cantonment, a salesperson scribbles down the order for medals. “Nine years, 20 years, 30 years... Rs 450...you will get them by tomorrow. For the Shaurya Chakra, you need to give me a request on a letterhead...the tailor outside will make your ribbons.” The medals are on his counter the next day, sealed in a plastic wrap with the name of the officer scrawled on it with a marker pen. The medals are fake, of course. Only the ministry of defence (MoD) is authorised to hand out service medals. Yet, for several years now, personnel of the 1.4 million-strong Indian armed forces have been purchasing cheap knockoffs from private military stores which dot the cantonments around the country. The reason? Bureaucratic paralysis in the MoD has short-circuited the delivery of medals. Despite a flurry of letters from the armed forces, in the past three years the services have not received any service medal. As a result, there is now a staggering backlog of over 1.5 million medals. Some 1.3 million army personnel, 180,000 IAF personnel and 44,000 navy personnel are waiting for their service medals. And it's an issue that unifies everyone, from the general to the soldier. The only option now is to buy the fake medals for the multiple ceremonial occasions throughout the year for, as an army officer says, ceremonial uniforms are incomplete without the medals.

Private stores have long provided an alternative to the shoddily made Ordnance Factory Board kit, like haversacks, combat boots and uniforms. They have now stepped in to bridge the medal gulf too. The medal knockoffs or replicas they procure from small workshops, however, are crude and lack the mandatory rim engraving of the personnel's name, rank and service number. That these medals are made of cheap white metal and are not the cupro-nickel government-issue means they are unlikely to last long enough to be handed down to the next generation. "The honour associated with a medal is totally lost when you buy it in a store," rues a senior army official. Worse, buying the fakes could technically be a violation of the MoD's Defence Services Regulations (DSR). Paragraph 291 of the DSR mandates that "all medals will be duly engraved before issue by the Government of India".

THE BACKLOG

1.57

MILLION MEDALS

SERVICES PERSONNEL WHO ARE STILL WAITING

ARMY
1,354,912

AIR FORCE
175,429

NAVY
44,000

The medal shortage has generated a silent rage. Senior military personnel see it as another instance of the divide between the civilian bureaucracy that runs the MoD and the armed forces personnel that function as its 'attached departments'. "The Indian army fights for *naam, namak, nishaan* (loosely, reputation, fidelity and ensigns)," one serving general says. "Medals are part of our *nishaan*. This insensitivity strikes at the very roots of our value system."

Military historian Squadron Leader Rana Chhina (retired), a prominent phalerist, calls the backlog 'disgraceful'. "These symbols lie at the core of a nation's military ethos. If they become meaningless, then it is emblematic of serious problems within the military system," he says.

India's armed forces, especially the army, suffers from an enormous backlog of weapons and equipment. The list is a long one, from fighter jets and utility helicopters to assault rifles and bulletproof jackets, and is generally referred to under a catchall word, 'modernisation'. The delays have been attributed to snail-paced decision-making within the MoD. But nothing even approaches the defence ministry's failure to provide medals on time. Armed forces personnel say they are by now inured to the late receipt of medals. Delays of upward of a year are commonplace. But the complete stoppage of the process is a new incomprehensible low.

Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Rajya Sabha MP and member, parliamentary standing committee on defence, calls the medal backlog "apathy of the worst kind". "This is reflective of a situation in the last few years where big-ticket items—jets, tanks and ships—are taking precedence over core welfare issues. From pensions to rations, core issues are being left to some nameless, faceless bureaucrat who has no intention or desire to fix the problem."

Medals are of three types—for gallantry, distinguished service and service (see graphic: *Types of Medals*). Only a handful of gallantry and distinguished service medals are handed out each year. These medals are procured from government mints and issued by the MoD's Directorate of Military Regulations and Forms (DMR&F), a department with a 20-strong workforce headed by a director-ranked officer based in RK Puram, Delhi.

The DSR handbook has an entire 22-page chapter on medals—their care, award, storage and what to do with them when they are lost or misplaced. But it's silent on what needs to be done when the MoD fails to deliver. It does not even mention fake medals. The trouble, military officials say, is acute in the category of long service medals—for nine, 20 and 30 years of military service—and ones like the Sainya Seva medal, J&K, Siachen Glacier medal, Special Service medal, Suraksha and Ucchh Tunga medal etc. It is here that the DMR&F goes into a freeze. "The medal jam is just another example of the defence ministry's callousness towards soldiers," says Lieutenant General Rameshwar Roy, former DG, Assam Rifles.

The MoD has come up with an anodyne phrase to refer to the backlog of service medals: 'pendency of medals for tri-services'. This has been the subject matter of heated letters from the army and meetings within the MoD. RTI responses from the adjutant general's branch in army headquarters, Delhi, reveal the extent of the MoD paralysis. Between 2006 and 2016, only 12,258 medals were issued to army personnel, against a requirement of 1.2 mil-

RAJWANT RAWAT

> **"These symbols lie at the core of a nation's military ethos. If they become meaningless, then it is emblematic of serious problems within the military system."**
>
> **Sqdn Ldr Rana Chhina (retd)**
>
> *Military historian and phalerist*

TYPES OF MEDALS

GALLANTRY

For exceptional bravery in the face of the enemy

IN WAR—Param Vir Chakra, Maha Vir Chakra, Vir Chakra

IN PEACETIME—Ashok Chakra, Kirti Chakra, Shaurya Chakra, Sena Medal

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

For distinguished service

Param Vishisht Seva Medal (PVSM), Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (AVSM), Vishisht Seva Medal (VSM)

SERVICE

Length of service, tenure in a particular theatre

Siachen Glacier Medal, High Altitude Medal, Sainya Seva Medal, Special Service Medal

Long service medals: 30, 20, 9 years

lion medals. In the last two years, no service medals have been issued.

The RTI queries were initiated by a serving army officer, who was incensed by the non-receipt of his nine years' service medal last year. The officer declined to accept his own medal out-of-turn and says will do so only after they are issued to the rest of the army. He is clearly in for a long wait.

Senior army officials say the MoD has not moved on the issue despite several reminders, the last of which went out in December 2016. MoD sources admitted that 1.56 million service medals were outstanding and that the "ministry has been making consistent efforts to procure the medals by following due procedure". Sources said a proposal for procuring 760,000 service medals is "under active consideration of the MoD's finance division" with a second proposal to procure 989,000 service medals from the India Government Mint, Kolkata, in the pipeline. (Army officials note how the tendering process has not even begun. It will take at least two years for the shortfall to be met.) Minutes of the last meeting held between the MoD and tri-services representatives on October 16, 2016, point to the reasons for the freeze.

For armed forces officials, this meeting illustrated the difference between the bureaucrat and the soldier. "For the armed forces personnel, a medal is what he lives for, what he serves for and what he could eventually die for. For instance, a Siachen medal testifies to the fact that he has spent time on the world's harshest battlefield. For the bureaucrat, it is just another procurement case, a minor one at that," says an army official. MoD officials griped about problems like "litigations, frequent queries from the finance division and changes in the procurement method which have created hurdles in the procurement of medals".

Deepak Narang, under secretary (MR&F) squarely blamed the Directorate General of Quality Assurance (DGQA) for the medal jam. The DGQA is the organisation that provides quality assurance for arms, ammunition, equipment and stores supplied to the armed forces. Narang revealed that "a departmental inquiry is currently

RAVI S. SAHANI

> **“This is apathy of the worst kind. From shoes to rations, core welfare issues are being left to some nameless, faceless bureaucrat who has no intention or desire to fix the problem.”**
>
> **Rajeev Chandrasekhar**
> *Rajya Sabha MP, member, parliamentary standing committee on defence*

THE REAL AND THE FAKE

REAL MEDALS

- Made of cupro-nickel
- Made in a Government of India mint
- A rim inscribed with the name, rank, service number of the recipient

FAKE MEDALS

- Made of white metal
- Available in private military stores around cantonments
- Not inscribed

SAMANYA SEVA MEDAL
1965

> **‘It’s just one more example of the defence ministry’s callousness and insensitivity towards soldiers.”**
>
> **Lt Gen. Rameshwar Roy (retd)**

in progress for the Meritorious Service medal (MSM) and Long Service and Good Conduct medal, procured under a repeat order sometime in 2015. The DGQA (it reports to the MoD) had requested the DMR&F to withhold issuance and distribution of medals until a clearance was issued by them.”

The matter, Narang informed the October 16 meeting, had been taken up with the DGQA several times, but they were informed that “a report in the matter has been submitted and further action to issue above medals will be intimated in due course”. On April 1 last year, the DMR&F moved a proposal for procuring 0.76 million cupro-nickel medals. The file remained with the defence finance department for 12 weeks before finally moving to the India Government Mint (IGM) in Kolkata, identified as a place where the medals could be minted. The rates from the IGM were still awaited as of October 2016 (MoD officials could not clarify if they had indeed placed orders for minting the medals). The process of issuing all 1.5 million medals is likely to take months, if not years.

Veterans see this as symptomatic of a larger and chronic civil-military discord. Major General Surjit Singh (retired) says the armed forces are a divided house and hence unable to forcefully demand what is due to them. “Our generals are unable to put up a united front because of their infighting. Secondly, the bureaucrats believe the soldiers play golf and have all the perks, while they have to deal with the files all day long.” Tragically, it is the military’s medals that have fallen into the chasm between the two.

Reader's digest

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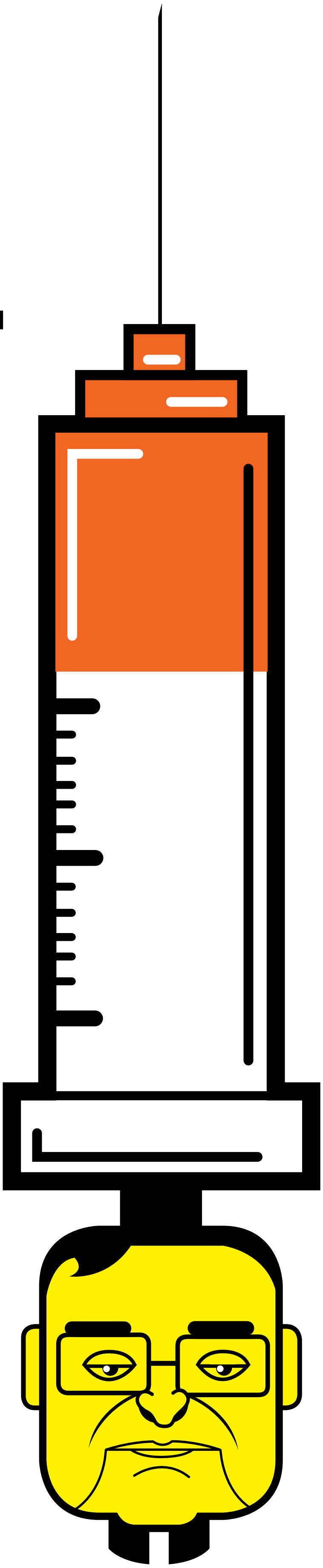
TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

NEED FOR A BOOSTER SHOT

An effective budget will be critical for the Modi government as it tries to steady an economy reeling under the effects of demonetisation

By Shweta Punj and M.G. Arun



Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's previous budget came amidst a serious drought, and he addressed it with plenty of sops for rural India. His fourth budget, to be presented on February 1, comes in even more trying circumstances—an economy thrown into disarray by the demonetisation that sucked out 86 per cent of India's currency. Can Jaitley pull off a budget that can heal the wounds and nurse the economy back to health?

The FM faces a challenge alright. Post-demonetisation, growth estimates have been slashed—Crisil estimates India's GDP growth for 2016-17 to drop by a percentage point to 6.6 per cent. Experts say for every percentage point drop in GDP growth, the economy would suffer a loss of around 6 million jobs. The Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) has pegged GDP growth at 7.1 per cent for 2016-17, but Pranjul Bhandari, chief India economist at HSBC, says the data has little credence as it ignores the impact of demonetisation (CSO has used data only till October 2016 for its GDP estimate). Add to this, the global tremors caused by Brexit and US President Donald Trump's protectionist rhetoric, and the fiscal year ahead looks challenging. The economy needs more than a balm, an elixir perhaps.

That Budget 2017 is being presented a month in advance and will include the rail budget only raises more challenges for Jaitley (February could have given a clearer picture of the fiscal year's final quarter). While there is a consensus that the FM needs to put together a budget that softens the blow of demonetisation, spurs consumption, and yet maintains fiscal discipline, it's all easier said than done. His options are limited.

WIGGLE ROOM

"The only certainty we have is the global uncertainty," says D.K. Joshi, chief economist at Crisil. Whatever happens with growth will largely be shaped by the domestic economy. "Not that the budget has the ability to revive the economy; we don't have the fiscal muscle to give a large stimulus," he adds.

Does the government data (till October) offer some comfort? Not really. "We might see a more severe impact in the fourth quarter," says Joshi.

With the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) still computing the currency deposited and exchanged at banks post-demonetisation, it is difficult to make assessments about any stimulus based on extinguishing the unreturned cash. According to D.K. Srivastava, chief policy advisor, EY India, on the brighter side, assuming that 5 per cent of demonetised currency does not come back, it could still be a meaningful source for short-term stimulus. Penal tax rates on unexplained deposits, or deposits on which tax has not been paid, could be another source of revenue. These together could add up to 0.75 percentage point of the GDP and offer the scope for a stimulus of more than 1 percentage point of GDP. There is also an expectation of higher tax collections next year.

6.6

PER CENT

is Crisil's estimate of India's GDP growth for 2016-17, down 1 percentage point

6

MILLION

is the expected loss of jobs if GDP growth slows down by 1 percentage point

The sharp contractionary effect of demonetisation in the short term is visible across sectors. Passenger vehicle sales of India's top three automakers plummeted in December despite an aggressive sales push. Ditto for two-wheelers. Sales at Mahindra & Mahindra dropped 8 per cent; at Maruti Suzuki and Hyundai Motor India, they fell 4 per cent during the month. Commercial vehicle sales were down 7 per cent in November (year on year). Figures put out by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) show that new investment proposals worth only Rs 1.25 lakh crore were made during the quarter ended December 2016, compared with an average Rs 2.36 lakh crore every quarter in the preceding nine quarters. Consumption contracted, too. Adi Godrej, chairman of the Godrej Group, said FMCG sales took a hit in November, but recovered in December as the cash crunch eased. The group has decided to cut back on advertising to tide over the period.

While demonetisation was done in one stroke, remonetisation is taking considerable time. "Remonetisation has been characterised by sharp rigidity," says Srivastava. "For the next two quarters, there will be a sharp contraction."

According to a Citi estimate, the RBI might have replenished around 45 per cent of the high-value currency notes by the end of December, but nearly half of it could be in the form 'low velocity' 2,000 rupee notes, which don't circulate easily. Assuming that the currency presses have the capacity to print 1.5 billion notes of Rs 500 denomination every month, it could take up to March-end or beyond to replenish the Rs 500 currency in sufficient numbers (there were 16 billion of these notes in circulation before the demonetisation drive). This cash crunch has had a ripple effect across the economy—the PMI (Purchasing Managers' Index, an indicator of business activity) of both the manufacturing and services sectors declined. The services sector contracted for the second month in a row in December.

A TIGHTROPE WALK

So, what are the options before the FM to alleviate the pain? One school of thought holds that the government should relax its FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) norms to allow for more spending. They argue the government should have the flexibility to adjust the fiscal deficit targets suited to the economic cycle of the country and not be rigid while setting targets. Cyclically adjusted fiscal deficit targets are practised in other countries, too. Jaitley, in his first budget in March 2015, laid out a fiscal consolidation roadmap that projected fiscal deficit at 3.9 per cent of GDP in 2015-16, 3.5 per cent in 2016-17 and 3 per cent in 2017-18. The government has managed to deliver on the 2015-16 target and wants to continue

Illustrations by ANIRBAN GHOSH

doing so, despite demonetisation and the pay commission packages (granting central government employees big pay increments). However, some economists argue that the government should bolster sentiment by relaxing its self-imposed fiscal deficit target of 3 per cent of GDP to 3.4 per cent in order to boost spending.

Another way of stimulating the economy could be to persuade the public sector entities to go through their expansion plans and ask departmental entities, such as the railways and postal department, to raise money outside the budget through special purpose vehicles.

Although banks are flush with funds from the increased deposits, the demand for credit has been low. This presents an opportunity to reduce interest rates. “They (the government) should concentrate on rationalising the tax structure in the light of GST,” says economist Lord Meghnad Desai. “They should impose financial transaction tax and reduce income tax.”

The budget is expected to usher in a new taxation regime for both indirect and direct taxes. The GST, which has made reasonable progress and could be implemented during the next fiscal in July 2017, would be a definitive step in indirect taxes—moving towards a more streamlined, transparent taxation system. The government has managed to resolve the question of tax administration, but the next few GST Council meetings will greatly determine the efficiency of the tax. “The goal of tax reform is simplicity, equity and efficiency, and these aspects are impacted by the rate structure, what is taxable and what isn’t,” says Satya Poddar, tax partner, policy advisory group, EY India. The government has not finalised those questions. Meanwhile, it seems to be struggling, with some states, such as West Bengal, insisting that the timing is not right for implementing GST. One of the key reasons cited for this argument is the impact of demonetisation on states’ finances.

3

PER CENT is the Modi government’s fiscal deficit target for financial year 2017-18

In direct taxes, the government wants to broaden the tax base. In the 2014-15 budget, it had announced its intention to reduce the corporate tax (basic) rate to 25 per cent by financial year 2019-2020 and implemented changes to the Income Tax Act in the 2015-16 budget, which will remove several tax exemptions for companies over a period of time, starting April 1, 2017. The government left the basic corporate tax rate unchanged in the

HOW TO GET WELL SOON

How Finance Minister Arun Jaitley could stimulate an economy suffering the aftershocks of demonetisation

CREATE JOBS

- Via spending on infrastructure, such as roads and construction
- Pushing the services and manufacturing sectors by streamlining taxation

SPUR CONSUMPTION DEMAND

- By increasing public spending to free up money for products and services
- Reduce income tax rates, give more incentives to first-time home buyers

GO BIG ON INFRASTRUCTURE

- Budget allocations for large infra projects
- Set up independent regulators to expedite resolution of disputes

RESTORE BANKS’ FISCAL HEALTH

- Hike allocation for capitalisation of PSU banks

FOCUS ON RURAL INDIA

- Focus on affordable rural housing, irrigation and roads. (Analysts expect a 0.2 per cent of GDP increase in the government’s capital expenditure spend)

DIGITISE THE ECONOMY

- Give higher tax concessions to boost digitisation
- Create enabling infrastructure for digitisation

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2016 budget, but amended the Income Tax Act to remove several exemptions for companies, starting April 1, 2017. Thus, it would be natural to expect a reduction in tax rates as certain tax exemptions would cease from April 1, 2017 and several more will cease over the next few years. Corporate tax rates may be dropped by 2 percentage points to 28 per cent.

But will Jaitley tweak the income tax slabs to provide sops to the *aam aadmi*? As of now, annual income between Rs 2.5 lakh and Rs 5 lakh attracts 10 per cent tax, income between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 10 lakh is taxed at 20 per cent, and income above Rs 10 lakh is taxed at 30 per cent. There is an additional education cess of 3 per cent.

RAISING RESOURCES

Indirect tax collections could have gone down because of low economic activity during most of financial 2017, but high excise duty on petroleum products gives the government fiscal room to offset the lower revenues from spectrum auction and divestment. Moreover, the government believes that demonetisation could have had a behavioural effect on companies, which until now were not entirely transparent about their revenue declarations. Jaitley is confident that the direct and indirect tax mop-up will surpass the budget estimate of Rs 16.3 lakh crore, higher than Rs 14.5 lakh crore of the previous fiscal.

1.11

LAKH CRORE rupees is the fall in new investment proposals in Oct-Dec 2016, compared to the previous nine quarters

A greater push towards public investment typically leads to an increase in private investment growth. The government ought to spend more on infrastructure, particularly roads and affordable housing. This will also help raise the demand for core industry sectors, such as steel and cement. In addition, construction of roads and low-cost housing is highly labour intensive in India, which will help generate employment in the economy. The government could also consider a bigger income tax incentive for first-time home buyers—they were given an additional Rs 50,000 tax exemption in the last budget for a house worth up to Rs 50 lakh with a loan of up to Rs 35 lakh. This announcement mostly benefitted end-users in tier II and III cities. Anuj Puri, chairman of property consultant JLL, feels a higher limit specific only to the bigger metros needs to be introduced. The government could consider additional income tax incentives for young middle class citizens buying their first homes.

To revive the investment cycle, the government needs to increase public sector spending and offer incentives to the private sector to take up new projects. This also requires increasing the budgetary allocation for the infrastructure sector, including railways and roads. Independent regulators should be put on the job for specific infrastructure sub-sectors to swiftly resolve issues that discourage the private sector from investing in new ventures.

> **"They (government) should concentrate on rationalising the tax structure in the light of GST, impose financial transaction tax and reduce income tax."**
>
> **Lord Meghnad Desai**
> ***British economist and politician***

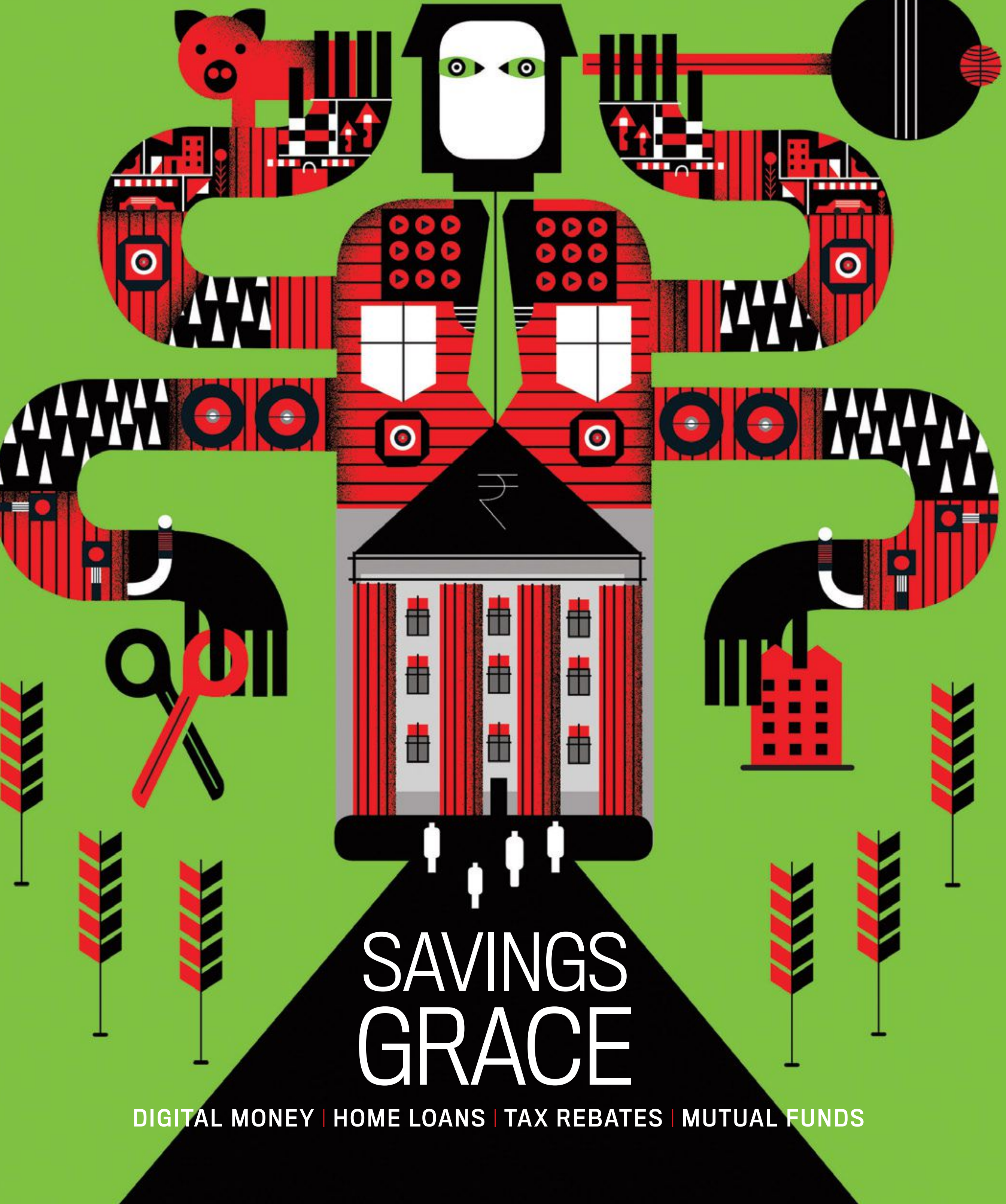
RESUSCITATE BANKING

The state of the banking system, especially the public sector banks (PSBs), remains an area of great concern. "The banking system has been stretched thin in November-December and will continue to be distracted in 2017," says Neelkanth Mishra, MD, equity research, Credit Suisse. Banks will need audits from multiple fronts to investigate cash inventory and procedural violations, he adds.

With rising bad debts and large capital needs to meet Basel III norms, PSBs would need to recover significantly from bad loans and mop up external capital to improve the earning and solvency profile and support credit growth. The capital requirement of PSBs will be in the region of Rs 1.5 lakh crore to Rs 1.8 lakh crore during 2016-17 to 2018-19 to meet the Basel III requirements. "We would expect higher allocation from the government towards capitalisation of PSBs," says ratings agency ICRA in a report.

The stage is set for a final balancing act. Given the limited room for manoeuvre, the FM faces a tough challenge to prevent the 'demon' in demonetisation from having the last laugh.

SMART MONEY



SAVINGS GRACE

DIGITAL MONEY | HOME LOANS | TAX REBATES | MUTUAL FUNDS

Illustrations by ANIRBAN GHOSH

LOOK BEYOND 80C FOR TAX SAVINGS

Home loans, health covers and student loans can substantially lower your tax outgo

When it comes to tax saving, most of us know about Section 80C (of the IT Act) under which we can claim a deduction of up to Rs 1.5 lakh a year. But there are deductions available under other heads too. Here are some you can look at:

» You can claim three types of deductions under the National Payment Systems (NPS). Besides the Rs 1.5 lakh under 80C, an additional Rs 50,000 is allowed under Section 80CCD (1B). An employee is also allowed to claim deduction against contributions made by the employer of up to 10 per cent of salary (basic plus dearness allowance) in the NPS under Section 80CCD(2).

» Home buyers can avail a deduction of up to Rs 2 lakh on interest paid on loan availed for self-occupied property. From this year on, first-time home buyers can also claim an additional deduction of up to Rs 50,000 against interest on home loan up to Rs 35 lakh (on property with value up to Rs 50 lakh). That said, home buyers can claim a deduction against interest paid only after the construction of the property is complete. Till last year, the condition for claiming interest deduction was that construction should be completed within three years of the date of availing the loan, but with construction/possession frequently delayed, the period has been increased to five years. If the property is not ready within five years, the deduction limit gets reduced to Rs 30,000 per year.

» If you are not a salaried person, or if house rent allowance (HRA) is not part of your salary, you can still claim deduction if you are staying in a rented accommodation. The amount will be the lower of the following—25 per cent of total gross income; Rs 5,000 per month (till last year the limit was Rs 2,000 per month) or the actual rent paid minus 10 per cent of total income.

Health insurance premium paid by you is eligible for tax deduction of up to Rs 25,000 for self, spouse and children

» Health insurance premium paid by you is eligible for tax deduction of up to Rs 25,000 for self, spouse and children. In case of senior citizens, the deduction limit is Rs 30,000. This includes preventive health check-ups done for up to Rs 5,000.

» Interest earned up to Rs 10,000 on savings bank accounts is exempt from tax. You have to show the interest income in your tax return to claim deduction.

» If you have a higher education loan for yourself, your child or spouse or a child of whom you are a guardian, you can claim a deduction against the entire amount on the interest paid for up to eight years or the tenure of the loan, whichever is earlier.

by Renu Yadav

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EXPERT VIEW

Sudhir Kaushik
Co-founder and CFO, TaxSpanner.com

“Tax outgo can be cut to zero on salaries of up to Rs 20 lakh, if one uses all options under the tax laws”

Vaibhav Sankla
MD, H&R Block India

“Up to Rs 2 lakh can be claimed as deduction on your investment in NPS”

IMPACT

In a falling interest rate scenario, debt mutual funds is poised to be better placed than traditional investment avenues, especially on a post tax basis

Mr Shagun Sutaria,
Managing Director, Shagun fincon

EMI-GRATION COUNTER

Should you transfer that home loan to avail of the recent rate cut?

Demonetisation might have ruined the yearend party for many, but 2017 began on a happier note, at least for home loan borrowers. Led by the State Bank of India, India's biggest public sector bank and the country's largest lender, many others also lowered lending rates, by a considerable 0.7 to 0.9 percentage points.

Beginning April 1, 2016, all banks had moved to the MCLR-based (marginal cost of funds) lending rate, derived on the basis of the incremental cost of funds. That is, loans were offered on an MCLR-plus-spread basis. This was a switch from the earlier base rate method banks followed, brought in to ensure transparency as well as quicker transmission of rate-cut benefits to borrowers. The base rate, in turn, had replaced the prime lending rate (PLR) in July 2010, which housing finance companies such as Housing Development Finance Corporation still follow.

What does it mean for the consumer? Those who borrowed before April 1, 2016, would still be paying EMIs according to the base rate or PLR method. They can, however, switch to the MCLR regime within the same bank or transfer their loan to another bank to avail of the falling interest rates.

Since MCLR is more dynamic, borrowers are likely to benefit from future rate cuts. However, a few things need to be kept in mind. First is the cost of transferring a loan, which includes charges such as conversion fee and administrative charges; then comes the remaining tenure of the loan. For example, if you have an outstanding loan of Rs 50 lakh at 9 per cent interest and 15 years to maturity, and the interest rate is reduced by 0.5 percentage points, you could save Rs 4.9 lakh for the period and reduce the loan term if you continue paying the same EMI. However, if there are just five years left, you save only Rs 39,000. After considering all the charges and the paperwork, one has to weigh whether it makes sense to switch.

As for those who took a loan after April 1, 2016, their home loan rate will go down only on the reset date even if they have taken the loan on MCLR. Banks usually choose their own reset date, which ranges from three months to a year, and is fixed at the time of taking a loan. So a person might have borrowed in December 2016 and rates might go down in January 2017, but he can avail of the cut only in December 2017 if his reset period is one year. It, therefore, always makes sense to go for a shorter reset period.

It is new borrowers, however, who stand to gain the most from the rate cut. They can avail of a home loan at the new rate. Not just that, they can also take bigger loans. So, if earlier, you could afford a loan of Rs 56 lakh, the 1 percentage point drop in rate will make you eligible for Rs 60 lakh for the same EMI.

by Renu Yadav

Follow the writer on Twitter @moneyrenu

8.65 PER CENT

The rate announced by the State Bank of India for floating home loans up to Rs 75 lakh beginning this year

EXPERT VIEW

Ranjit Punja
CEO & Co-founder, CreditMantri

“Transfer your home loan to MCLR only if you think the savings in interest will compensate for the fee expense and time spent on paperwork”

Anil Kothuri, Head, retail finance, & CEO, housing finance, Edelweiss Financial Services

“Speak to your lender to reduce rates. Else, switch to another lender offering a lower rate, after considering factors such as the cost of switching”

SHOULD YOU INVEST IN MULTI-CAP FUNDS?

These funds are a way to moderate your risk-reward profile

Over the past few years, multi-cap funds have done significantly better than large-cap funds, providing investors with a portfolio diversified across stocks with small to large market caps. But are these funds for you? Let's find out.

What are multi-cap funds?

Multi-cap funds invest in stocks of companies across the market capitalisation spectrum; they could be large-cap, mid-cap or small-cap stocks. In short, multi-cap funds have the flexibility to adapt their portfolios according to the market. Different segments in the market tend to perform in different phases. These funds typically invest 50 to 90 per cent in large-cap stocks, 10 to 40 per cent in mid-cap stocks and up to 10 per cent in small-cap stocks.

What about fund strategies?

While some are called multi-cap funds, a large number of funds, though not named as such, follow a multi-cap strategy. For instance, the ICICI Prudential Value Discovery Fund, one of the best performing funds in the category, has consistently maintained a multi-cap approach with almost 75 per cent invested in large-cap stocks, 20 per cent in mid-caps and the balance in small-cap funds. The fund does not have any restrictions on market capitalisation from an investment mandate point of view. It does not follow a sectoral approach, but instead adopts a value investing strategy, buying stocks whose prices are low relative to their historic performance, earnings, book value, cash flow potential and dividend yields. Then there are funds which are itself known as multi-cap funds like the SBI Magnum Multi Cap Fund, which too has performed exceedingly well over the past five years, returning 24 per cent and 21 per cent for three and five years, respectively. The fund invests about 55 per cent in large-cap stocks.

EXPERT VIEW

Anil Rego
CEO, Right Horizons

> "It is advisable to stay invested in multi-cap funds for more than three years. These should be allocated to achieve some financial goals"

Risk versus returns

Because the investment allocation has a direct impact on the risk profile, multi-cap funds bear a higher risk compared to large-cap funds. That said, multi-cap funds have done better due to the inclusion of mid- and small-cap stocks in the portfolio (these have done better than large-cap stocks in the past few years). Over the past three years, the category average return for these funds has been 19 per cent, compared to 14 per cent delivered by the large cap category. Over the past five years, they have returned 17 per cent, compared to 14 per cent by large cap funds. The best performing funds in this category have returned 25 per cent in the past three years and 20 per cent over the past five years.

Are multi cap funds for you?

Multi-cap funds are really for those who want to take a balanced risk exposure in the equity space. For instance, if an investor had invested in large-, mid- and small-cap stocks in the ratio of 50 per cent, 25 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, during the past one year, his returns would have been around 13 per cent.

by Tanvi Verma
Follow the writer on Twitter @vtanvi

IMPACT

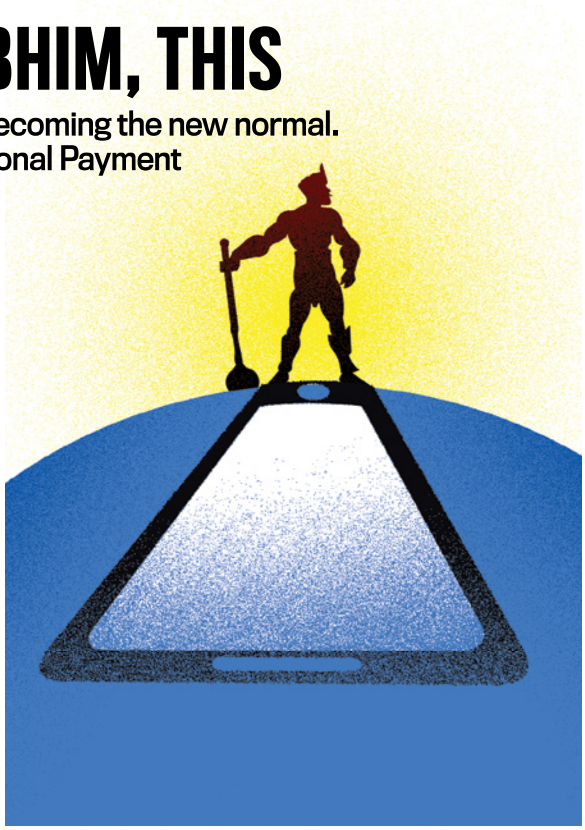
"The simplest but the most important resolution for the New Year should be to have a balanced portfolio. What is often forgotten is the necessity to have a balanced portfolio. A proper asset allocation ensures that the portfolio is not much impacted just because of the down trend in a certain class of asset."

Yasir Varawala, Director, Abacus Corporation Private Ltd

TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

NO CHHOTA BHIM, THIS

Digital transactions are becoming the new normal. We take a look at the National Payment Corporation's BHIM app



The age of digital money has arrived. Take, for example, the National Payments Corporation of India's (NPCI's) newly launched Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) app. Only days after being launched, around 10 million people had downloaded and installed BHIM, and over 2 million transactions had taken place over its unified payment interface (UPI) and unstructured supplementary service data (USSD) platforms. While it is only one of many such apps, BHIM stands out for several reasons.

First is security. Most digital wallets rely on your smartphone's screen lock, and often don't even ask for a password before processing transactions. Therefore, if the phone is stolen and its screen unlocked, your wallet balance is at risk. The BHIM app, on the other hand, has a two-stage security system: one password to access the app, and another one—a UPI PIN number—to make transactions.

Second is the freedom of transactions allowed. Most digital wallets require money to be 'loaded' into them—essentially, you first have to transfer money into your digital wallet, and only then can you make payments from it. If you want to withdraw that money as cash, you first need to transfer it back into your bank account, which attracts processing fees of 1-4 per cent. Also, most wallets come with a transaction limit of about Rs 1 lakh per month. BHIM stands out in this regard because it allows transfers directly to and from bank accounts, and features a much higher limit—Rs 20,000 a day, with a Rs 10,000 limit per transaction.

EXPERT VIEW

Bipin Preet Singh
Co-founder, MobiKwik

“We hope that provisions will be made for the registration of e-wallets on the UPI, enabling people to pay through bank accounts or e-wallets using the BHIM app”

Vivek Locheb
CEO, TruPay

“BHIM is a skeleton of what UPI does, which is to send and receive payments. TruPay starts where BHIM stops, offerering value-added services”

One of the factors driving the shift from physical to digital money is the discounts and special offers being made available to users of online platforms. For its part, the NPCI offers users access to two of NITI Aayog's lucky draw schemes: the Lucky Grahak Yojana for retail consumers, and the Digi-Dhan Vyapar Yojana for merchants. Under the former scheme, 15,000 retail consumers are selected via a lucky draw on a daily basis to receive a minimum of Rs 1,000; there is also a weekly draw, through which 7,000 consumers win prizes worth Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10,000 and Rs 5,000. Under the latter scheme, 7,000 merchants win prizes worth Rs 50,000, Rs 5,000 and Rs 2,500 on a weekly basis.

15,000

CONSUMERS

win a minimum of Rs 1,000 every day, under the NPCI's Lucky Grahak Yojana scheme

BHIM offers other features as well, such as the ability to check bank balances, support for multiple bank accounts, as well as transfers to non-UPI registered bank accounts using Indian Financial System Codes (IFSC).

For the moment, the BHIM app is available only in English and Hindi, though that is sure to change as more and more Indians switch to digital transactions.

by Priyadarshini Maji

Follow the writer on Twitter @PriyadarshiniM9

RADICAL NOTE

Marshalling many a writer, thinker and philosopher, Pankaj Mishra tries to make sense of the world around us in the era of Trump and Brexit

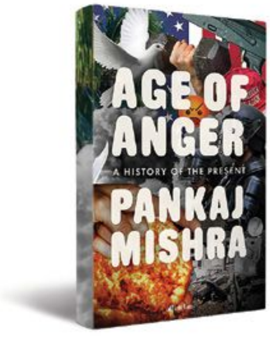
By Shougat Dasgupta

Getty Images

Decrying 2016 as that most disastrous of years for liberals has become a meme, as columnists, public intellectuals and pop culture celebrities line up to bemoan a worldwide reversion to fear, distrust, anger and hatred culminating in the election of Donald Trump, an orange alert if ever there was one. “Something is rotten in the state of democracy,” Pankaj Mishra wrote in a recent column in the *New York Times*. “The stink first became unmistakable in India in May 2014,” he added, “when Narendra Modi, a member of an alt-right Hindu organisation inspired by fascists and Nazis, was elected prime minister.” It was a line calculated to cause umbrage. Cudgels were duly taken up against Mishra in the comments, with one disgruntled supporter warning American readers not to “go by this Marxist portrayal of Modi. Its [sic] full of lies and fabrications... People like Pankaj Mishra are involved in Maoist terrorism in India. That is Mishra’s ideal system, a communist revolution”. Down a phone line from Myanmar, it’s difficult to discern what dastardly plot the soft-spoken, painstakingly precise Mishra has in mind. He is not forthcoming about the details. Rather than the overthrow of Modi, what Mishra wants to talk about is his forthcoming book, *Age of Anger*, published in India in handsome hardback by Juggernaut Books, which addresses the electoral shocks of Brexit, Trump, and the defeat, at least momentary, of “Enlightenment humanism and rationalism”, to quote Mishra quoting the Canadian historian and former politician Michael Ignatieff. Some might see in such pronouncements, or in the assertion that ‘demagogues’ such as Modi “have tapped into the simmering reservoirs of cynicism, boredom and discontent”, further evidence of Mishra’s de haut en bas condescension. Does one have to be a bored, irrational, envious cynic to have voted for Modi?

The hand-wringing of so-called liberals, particularly after the election of Trump, can be a little hard to take, as if they had not been active participants, indeed leaders, in exacerbating inequalities and bombing poorer countries. But Mishra’s argument is not so facile. His is not a straight-faced rendering of Woody Allen’s (semi?) comic suggestion, in *Everyone Says I Love You*, that spouting conservative shibboleths could only be the result of temporary insanity. *Age of Anger* is about the failures of the Enlightenment, the smug, moral superiority, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau put it, of the “imperious dogmatists”. Rousseau, Mishra wrote in an essay, “thrived on his loathing of metropolitan vanity, his distrust of technocrats and of international trade, and his advocacy of traditional mores”. In Voltaire, the great French satirist and poster boy of free speech, Rousseau found the embodiment of all he resented about the Enlightenment—urbanity, intellectual self-confidence, and a disregard, even contempt, for the traditional.

It gives Mishra a neat hook. Played out in the salons of Enlightenment Paris, in the antagonism between Rousseau and Voltaire are arguments with a contemporary resonance. It’s a little like a European version of the medieval animus between the Muslim polymath Ibn Rush and the doctrinaire theologian Ghazali, the former a kind of humanist and the latter a man of piety, of unwavering faith. In the *New Yorker*, Mishra wrote that Rousseau had come to seem like “the central protagonist in the anti-elitist revolt currently reconfiguring our politics”. He is, “a little like Modi”, Mishra said on the phone from Yangon, “the man from the provinces with big



Age of Anger
A History of the Present
by Pankaj Mishra
Juggernaut Books
Available in bookstores and
www.juggernaut.in
Price: Rs 699 (hardback)
Pages: 432

People, says Mishra, no longer want to be told what to do by an entrenched elite, to be told how to live "while being excluded from the high table"

ideas". Modi felt a deep anger towards the Anglophile metropolitan elite of India, a class of people happy to spout pabulum about the poor while enriching themselves, or so the characterisation goes.

Mishra, himself arguably a provincial, or at least outside the Anglo-American elite to which he now belongs, or is criticised for pandering to, feels sympathy for the Nietzschean ressentiment that he believes characterises contemporary anti-elitism—"an intense mix of envy and sense of humiliation and powerlessness," he writes, "...poisons civil society and undermines political liberty, and is presently making for a global turn to authoritarianism and toxic forms of chauvinism".

People, Michael Gove, the British Conservative politician, said during the Brexit debates "have had enough of experts". People, Mishra says in our conversation no longer want to be told what to do by an "entrenched elite", to be "told how to live" while being "excluded from the high table". Of course, the whole point of having a high table in the first place is exclusion. It is the "self-satisfaction", Mishra acknowledges, of the 'great and the good', which has allowed demagogues like Trump, or Recep Erdogan in Turkey, or Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, to curdle popular dissatisfaction into anger, resentment and ugly prejudice.

Part of the technocratic misunderstanding, Mishra contends, is the reduction of human beings to actors motivated by economic self-interest. "In my book," Mishra says, "I am asking for something very very modest, that we consider other aspects of the human experience: fearing of losing dignity, for instance, losing honour." In *Age of Anger*, Mishra turns to Dostoevsky—as he turns to a vast catalogue of writers and thinkers throughout these pages—to explain 19th century bewilderment with the narrowness of the Enlightenment, of the individualism that emerged, the materialism that resulted in "a principle of isolation, of intense self-preservation, of personal gain, of the I, of opposing this I to all nature and the rest of mankind".

Unable to adapt to the Darwinian ethos of the modern world, of uneven economic growth, of feeling left out and alienated by 'progress', people turned in Europe to demagogues. It is a process, Mishra observes, that is eerily similar to what has been happening in the world for the past couple of years. "Committed to seeing the individual self as a rational actor," he wrote in the *Guardian*, "we fail to see that it is a deeply unstable entity, constantly shaped and reshaped in its interplay with shifting social and cultural conditions." It is not a mistake that Modi, for all his talk of GDP and development, makes.

His appeal to public patriotism to support, in Mishra's words, "harebrained" policies such as demonetisation has been effective when rationality and economic self-interest would suggest a greater degree of disgruntlement. Mishra, who says "two or three years is a very long time in politics", still holds out hope for "fragments of opposition, a regional coalition" to muster sufficient strength to test Modi by 2019, but acknowledges that no language has yet been found to counter the prime minister. Instead, vide Arvind Kejriwal, the professed opposition has begun to plagiarise Modi's vocabulary of self-aggrandisement. Modi himself, as many have noted, is plagiarising Indira Gandhi—India is Modi, and Modi is India, as some functionary will no doubt be trotted out to say, or rather tweet.

Age of Anger makes useful connections, shows that the alienated young Europeans who cause destruction in their countries in the name of ISIS are not a fresh evil but a contemporary avatar of a deeply familiar type. Perhaps, as Mikhail Bakunin, an important figure in this book, said, "we come always to the same sad conclusion, the rule of the great masses of the people by a privileged minority." That privileged minority are the angry outsiders who have emerged in the decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, or, in our case, the 'liberalising' of India's economy, to lay waste to triumphalist proclamations of the end of history.

Gentle fun can be had at Mishra's expense. He is one of those "people with projects"—the latest of which, and the reason he is in Burma, is to write about the "militarisation of Buddhism"—a phrase he takes from the legal scholar David Kennedy, to describe the discredited elite. But he recognises his kind and is clear-eyed about their delusions and so helps us see a little more clearly ourselves.

OSCAR
HOPES
PG 96

ARCHIE
GETS REAL
PG 94

LEISURE

STREAMING ACROSS
BORDERS
PG 92

GET INTIMATE:
SUNNY LEONE
PG 106

ANJALI LAMA, 32
The transgender model will headline the Lakme India Fashion Week in Mumbai in February

FIRST PERSON

Why Live a Double Life?

I remember my village—a remote hamlet of four or five houses, about 150 kilometres from Kathmandu. When I was a child, I used to remind myself that I was a boy, and try to behave like men. I wanted to be a girl, but I was afraid.

The last time I went back to my village was when my mother passed away. I cried all the way. She had told me once that it didn't matter whether I was a son or a daughter. My mother knew my heart.

After high school, I came to Kathmandu and started working in a restaurant to pay for college. Employers would taunt me and say that I was driving away their customers. Then, in 2005, I saw an episode of a television show called *Sangharsh* about transgenders. I didn't feel I was alone anymore.

One night I saw two transgendered women walking to a nightclub, and I followed them and accosted them. I told them I had wanted to be a woman all my life. I told them I wanted to be with them. I told them I wanted to wear makeup. That was the beginning of my transformation. My adoptive mother in the transgender community rechristened me Anjali Lama.

I was a pretty boy. My friends often said I should be a model. But I never thought of trying until a Nepali magazine called *Voice of Women* put me on the cover for a feature on the transgender community of Kathmandu in 2009.

After that, I was rejected for Nepal Fashion Week thrice. In the press, I was Nepal's first transgender model. But a section of fashion designers was against me. In 2010, I went for breast augmentation in Bangkok, using my savings. I felt very happy. At least I could have part of what I always wanted.

I first auditioned for the Lakme India Fashion Week (LIFW) in February 2016, but I was not selected. I was heartbroken, and I returned to Nepal and tried to forget about modelling. I was over 30 years old. But I wanted it so badly that I saved up money and returned to Mumbai in June to audition for the Autumn/Winter season at LIFW. I was rejected again, and again I slunk back to Kathmandu.

> **"When my mother died, I cried all the way to my village. She'd told me it didn't matter if I was a son or a daughter"**

Then I remembered my mother had told me never to give up. A friend agreed to let me stay with him in Mumbai, so I moved here in November last year. I wrote to modelling agencies. Nobody wrote back. My money was running out. I spent countless hours in a dark room thinking about my life.

Then in December, I heard that LIFW was again having auditions. I had failed in the past because I had hidden my gender, so I wrote to Lakme and asked if a transgender could audition. They said I could. For the next 10 days, I practised my walk and taught myself not to be daunted by anything. This time I wasn't rejected.

Now, I am happy. I am happy with my body, my dreams and my journey. I came from nowhere. Maybe I will go everywhere.

—As told to Chinki Sinha

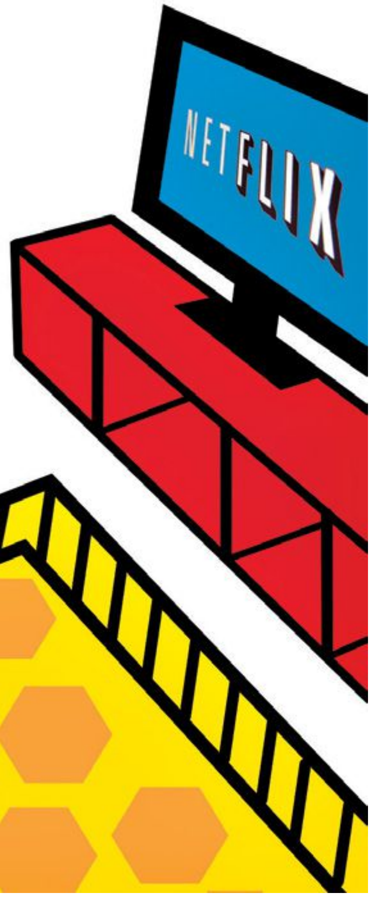
TELEVISION

Borderless Television

Begun as a DVD-mailing service, Netflix has leapt into an unexpected lead in television's next revolution: Borderless TV. Last Wednesday, it reported a 56 per cent increase in profits—along with 100 million members, 44 million outside the US—thanks to its success learning "how best to match content with audiences tastes around the world". With the India launch of Amazon Prime Video last December, the next phase of borderless TV is set to begin.

Following the HBO-led explosion of high-quality serials, from *The Sopranos* to *Game of Thrones*, Netflix has erased national boundaries on the small screen.

Last year, it launched its streaming service in more than 130 countries. To compete, they needed local content, as well movies and shows produced in America. But the acquisition of that content has been more transformative than expected. **"Since we went international, the [non-American] portion of our content is increasingly growing, especially with our Indian and Korean content,"** said Netflix spokeswoman Jessica Lee.



WATCH LIST

TRAPPED (ICELAND)
First shown in English on the BBC, *Trapped* is an Icelandic crime series involving human trafficking, murder, domestic violence and political corruption. Some viewers were reminded of the Cohen Brothers' hit *Fargo*—though it stops short of outright satire. (On Netflix)

FAUDA (ISRAEL)
Focusing on elite Jewish counterterrorism experts who go undercover to hunt for a Palestinian militant known as 'the Panther', this fast-paced Israeli thriller demonstrates a surprising sympathy for both sides of the conflict. Unusually for a drama, each episode is only 30 fraught minutes. (On Netflix)

3% (BRAZIL)
This Brazilian sci-fi series portrays a world where favela dwellers compete in a bizarre psychological game for the right to become part of the '3 per cent' who live in a supposedly perfect society known only as 'The Offshore.' Anybody who's taken the TOEFL should be able to relate. (On Netflix)

Prime Video's plans to produce 18 original TV serials for the Indian market indicate it's on a similar path. "Good content doesn't have any barriers due to language," says Nitesh Kripalani, Prime Video's India head.

That's especially true on the sites' home pages—where there's often no division between local and foreign serials. **Sometimes it's not even apparent that a serial is not in English until you begin watching it.**

Netflix's French-language *Call My Agent*, for example, looks like a US programme—*Madmen* meets *Entourage*—at first glance. Nor does the blurb hint it's set in Paris: "Tantrums. Treachery. Secret flings. When you work for stars this big, the juiciest dramas play out behind the scenes." Similarly, neither *3 Per cent* (Brazil), *Cronos* (Argentina) nor *Trapped* (Iceland), nor any other show is relegated to a non-English purgatory.

The boundary breaking is flowing into production, too. Netflix's *Narcos* was nearly 50 per cent Spanish, and depicted Colombia with impressive realism. Amazon's *Mozart in the Jungle* likewise took its fictional New York Philharmonic Orchestra to Mexico City in Season Two for a two-episode stretch that depicted that country with unprecedented nuance.

Next up is a revolution in Indian TV serials. Netflix is working on a serial adaptation of Vikram Chandra's thriller, *Sacred Games*, while Amazon Prime Video is producing a sports drama with Farhan Akhtar and Vivek Oberoi, and a series about the founder of the Shaolin Temple in China.

Once, TV built parochial communities, as every American watched *All in the Family* and every Indian tuned into *Hum Log*. Now, the community is global, and it's forming on-demand.

—Jason Overdorf

Fuzzy Logic

The ministry of information and broadcasting insists it has no plans to censor online streaming services. So, any censorship on those platforms is **self-censorship**. Amazon Prime, having been noncommittal pre-launch, has erred on the side of caution. An hour-long episode of *Grand Tour*, Jeremy Clarkson's facile post-*Top Gear* offering on Amazon Prime, in India runs for only half an hour. Why? Because all references to a car made of meat were excised. If the bar is that low, what else are they censoring? And why?

Pop's
CHOCK'LIT SHOPPE

COMING UP NEXT

CHOCKLIT SHOPPE NOIR

Archie Comics Publications of Mamaronek NY, *estd. in 1939 by Maurice Coyne, Louis Silberkeit and John Goldwater*

Est. revenue (2002):
$15 million

No relation of...
Archies Limited of New Delhi, *estd. in 1979 by Anil Moolchandani*

Est. turnover (2015):
$29 million
(Rs 19,568.8 lakh)

A new TV serial premiering this week promises a reincarnation of the American teenagers a generation of Indian children loved. But will we love them still?

Archie Andrews and his 'gang' have a lot to answer for to a certain generation of Indians. The eternal American teenager who began life in the 1940s somehow became a 'youth icon' for comic-addicted desi kids, particularly in the import-substitution decades of the 1960s and 70s. There's an argument to be made that Archie was ultimately responsible for the economic liberalisation of the 1990s, and the transformation of Indian culture that accompanied it. You know: pizzas, burgers, milkshakes, dating...

But the perennially preppy adolescent didn't age well and fell behind in the various tides of consumerism and new media that swept more recent generations of Indian kids. A shrinking audience in the comic's home market has seen various attempts to rebrush the brand with more reality and diversity including new gay and Indian characters but apparently to little avail.

With a star cast that includes K.J. Apa (Archie Andrews), **Molly Ringwald** (Mary Andrews), **Luke Perry** (Fred Andrews), Camila Mendes (Veronica Lodge) and Olivia Ryan Stern as **Tina Patel (the 'Indian Veronica')**, *Riverdale* might change all that. The serial is being talked up as a 'subversive' noirish, sexy and dark take on the hitherto vanilla world of Archie and Co. David Lynch's legendarily spooky 1990 series *Twin Peaks* has been invoked as an influence. As it happens, that series is being revived this year and will release in May. And just to add to the woowoo: Mädchen Amick of *Twin Peaks* plays Betty's mom in *Riverdale*, Alice Cooper.

(Riverdale *premiers on Colors Infinity on January 27, 7 pm)*

–Jabir

THEATRE

Revising Shakespeare

Following his 2012 adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, entitled *Piya Behrupiya*, Atul Kumar is back with *Khwaab Sa*, his version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The eclectic and experimental staging mixes modern dance, live music, more traditional theatrical forms and a polyglot tongue, including a Hindi version of gibberish. "I love breaking rules and turning things on their heads," says Kumar.
(*In Mumbai through Feb 5.*)

BANDEEP SINGH

MUSIC

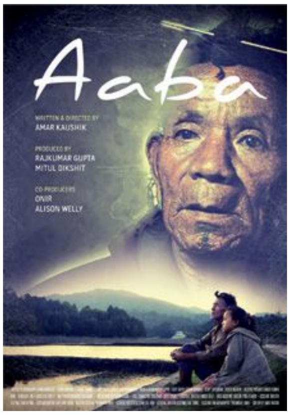
Street Singer

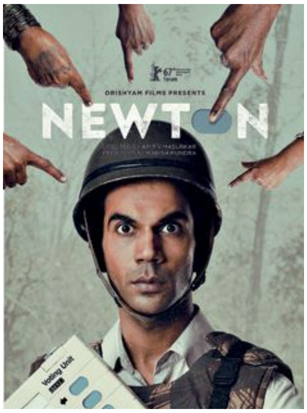
In *Poromboke* (which translates to 'land exempt from assessment, because it is either uncultivable or communal land), T.M. Krishna sings: "*It is not for you, nor for me, it is for the community.*" The song *Chennai Poromboke Paadal*, originally by Kaber Vasuki, was recorded as part of a campaign to spotlight the industrial encroachment of Chennai's Ennore Creek. The 40-year-old Magsaysay awardee has been hailed both for his social work as well as his bid to democratise Carnatic music, by choosing to perform in the city' slums, rather than at more traditional venues

FESTIVAL

BERLIN BOUND

This year's **BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL** features two Indian entries. Amar Kaushik's *Aaba* centres on an Arunachali tribal girl and her cancer-stricken grandfather, while in Amit V. Masurkar's *Newton*, a government official tries to conduct free and fair elections in Chhattisgarh


Aaba
WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY
AMAR KAUSHIK
PRODUCED BY
RAJKUMAR GUPTA
MITUL DIKSHIT
CO-PRODUCERS
ONIR
ALISON WELLY


DRISHYAM FILMS PRESENTS
NEWTON

OSCAR BUZZ

Boy Wonder

Nominated for Oscars in the best picture, best cinematography and best original score categories (with a nomination for Dev Patel as best supporting actor), *Lion* is the closest India will get to an Academy Award when the hardware is doled out February 26 (telecast in India on the morning of February 27).

The true story of Saroo Brierley, who tracked down his biological parents in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh, some 25 years after he was separated from them by a tragic mistake, *Lion* features ***Slumdog Millionaire*** **star Dev Patel, Bollywood's Priyanka Bose and Nicole Kidman. But it's Sunny Pawar** (pictured below)—who plays the five-year-old Saroo—who has the US media going gaga. "He kills it on the red carpet and talk shows," says Bose, who plays Saroo's biological mother, Kamala. She also described Kamala as a "strong single mother" who never loses hope despite losing two of her four kids in one night. **Directed by Garth Davis**, *Lion* follows five-year-old Saroo as he accidentally boards a train to Calcutta—becoming lost—where he is eventually adopted by an Australian family. Twenty-five years later, the grown up Saroo (Dev Patel) uses Google Maps to find his way back home.

The director's team featured first assistant **Ananya Rane, who worked on *Million Dollar Arm* and *Life of Pi*.** India casting director Tess Joseph tapped Tannishtha Mukherjee, Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Deepti Naval and child actor Abhishek Bharate, and discovered Pawar after interviewing over 2,000 school kids.

Though it's won plenty of plaudits, *Lion* didn't come out a winner at the recent Golden Globes, where Pawar stole the show. The inevitable comparison to *Slumdog* may even hurt its chances at an Oscar. As Rane said, "There's no masala. These are real events that have happened. It's more an introspective journey."

–Suhani Singh

NEW DISCOVERY SUNNY PAWAR, WHO PLAYS THE FILM'S MAIN CHARACTER AS A CHILD, HAS CHARMED AUDIENCES WORLDWIDE

COMEBACK

A PRABHAKAR RAO

BACK TO WORK

After a 10-year break, the 61-year-old Konidela Siva Sankara Vara Prasad, better known as Chiranjeevi, is back, playing the title role in *Khaidi No. 150*, his 150th film. "I am making a comeback, prompted by the pressure of fans and demands of producers," explains Chiranjeevi, adding, "Amitabh Bachchan and Rajinikanth suggested publicly that 149 films is not the number to stop at." Enthused by the response to the film, a remake of the Tamil *Katthi*, he has already begun work on a second—a period piece, inspired by the exploits of the 19th century freedom fighter Uyyalawada Narasimha Reddy, in Rayalaseema, Andhra Pradesh—to hit the screens by October.

WATCH LIST

Kaabil
VS Raees

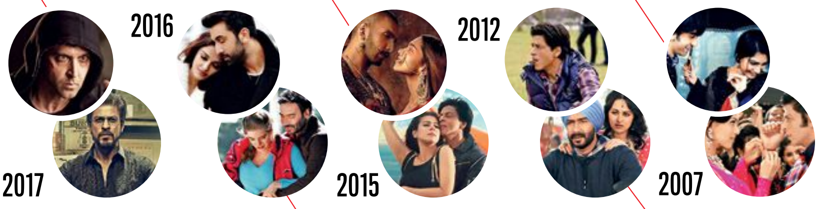
Hrithik Roshan and Shah Rukh Khan will face off on January 25. When two big movies clash it's not just the producers who suffer

Bajirao Mastani
VS Dilwale

In this clash between the two Bollywood majors, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's historical epic lost out to the Shah Rukh Khan starrer

Saawariya
VS Om Shanti Om

The acrimony led Bhansali to later write that he was "very hurt" by the comments SRK had made at the time



Ae Dil Hai Mushkil
VS Shivaay

Karan Johar may have scored his biggest hit, but it cost him his 25-year-long friendship with Kajol

Jab Tak Hai Jaan
VS Son of Sardaar

This fight grew so messy that Ajay Devgn eventually took Yash Raj Films to the Competition Commission

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DAKAR DECONSTRUCTED

At the climax of the 9,000-km-long 2017 **Dakar Rally** across Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina, Joaquim Rodrigues crossed the finish line in 10th position for the debutant **Hero MotoSports Team Rally**—eclipsing veteran C.S. Santosh, who came in 47th. Here's a look at their ride—an upgraded version of the Speedbrain 450 rally bike.

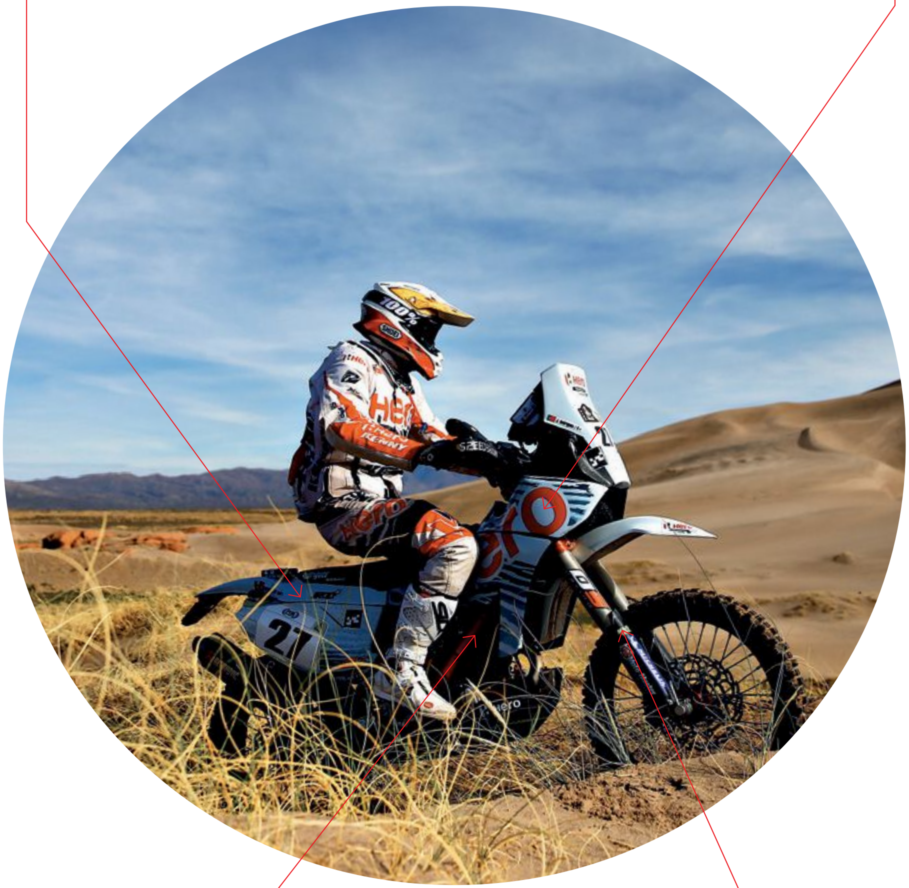
—**Harsh Man Rai**

FUEL TANKS

Two specially designed fuel tanks are positioned below the seat with a combined capacity of 29 litres–competitors must cover at least 250 km before refuelling, and every stop costs precious time

BODY

The Chromium-molybdenum steel frame provides the bike with extreme durability, without increasing weight. The bodywork is a carbon-Kevlar composite, further enhancing its strength



GETTY IMAGES

ENGINE

The oil-cooled, 4-stroke single-cylinder engine features two overhead camshafts, four valves and electronic intake pipe injection / digital engine management. At 449.5 cc, it produces 55 PS, or 54 horsepower

SUSPENSION

The suspension has a massive travel of 300 mm (11.8 inches) up front and 320 mm (12.6 inches) out back. 52 mm WP cone valve inverted forks with steering damper and Trax rear shock with full linkage for the rear

---

RACE CALENDAR

Garwhal Runs
February 14
Qualifying run for those interested in taking part in 111 km category at La Ultra-The High. Qualifying time: 11 hrs

Stupa-to Stupa
March 4
A single day race, the 50-km route starts at Kathmandu's Swayambu Temple and finishes at the city's Bodnath Stupa

Himalayan Trail
April 12
A 50-stage race across the entire Nepalese Himalayas

Bir-Billing
April 16
The mostly tarmac half-marathon runs through villages, farms, and Buddhist monasteries

Manali-Leh Ultra
June 10
Runs 480 km from Manali to Leh along the highest highway in the world

The **GSR TUFFMAN MANALI SNOW ULTRA** is the latest race to join a boom in Himalayan running

ADVENTURE

Endorphin Highs

The inaugural 50 km and 64 km races of the **GSR Tuffman Manali Snow Ultra** on January 27 near Manali in Himachal Pradesh are the latest in an explosion of hard-core road and trail races throughout the Himalayas.. The best of the new races are brutally long and arduous. One of the pioneers, the **High (or La Ultra**), is a three-day stage-race in Ladakh that crosses three passes higher than 17,500 feet (5,330 metres) in altitude, as competitors in three classes race 111, 222, and 333 kilometres. Similarly gruelling, the **Hell Ultra** is a five-day stage-race covering the 480 km from Manali to Leh, crossing five passes as high as 18,000 feet (5,490 metres) along the way.

The **Tuffman Snow Ultra** this week is gentle in comparison. But that's part of the appeal; this is a race for regular runners. While some of the other Himalayan events are trail races, the Snow Ultra is really for road runners. The 18 km loop traverses a motorable road along the banks of the Beas river that's 95 per cent tar road. It's also geared for ultra fans, rather than professional competitors, with distance categories of 20, 32, 50 and 64 km and generous cut-off times, if you don't plan to walk all the way.

—E. Theophilus

TECHNOLOGY

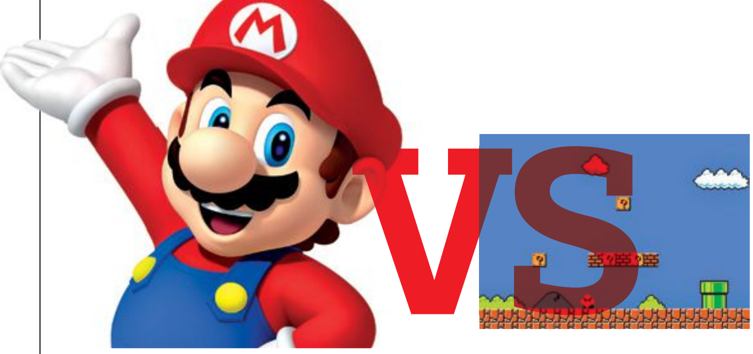
GAMING GAGA

It's not clear yet whether the **NINTENDO SWITCH**, an iPad Mini-sized tablet that comes with a dock that converts it to a gaming console, will be able to match the original 1985 **NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM**—which still sells on eBay for hundreds or even thousands of dollars.

VS
NINTENDO SWITCH

NINTENDO'S original system was arguably the greatest home gaming console of all time. It was so popular that it crushed sales figures for the then-popular Commodore-64 personal computer

THE SWITCH will not support video streaming, or allow users to play Nintendo's Wii, Wii U, or 3DS games. Can it nevertheless fight off competition from tablets and phones?



SUPER MARIO RUN clocked over 40 million downloads within four days of being launched for iOS systems. Reportedly, an Android-friendly version of the game is to be released in March

SUPER MARIO BROS held the title for best-selling game of all time on a single console for 30 years. In that time, it had seen sales of over 40 million units. It was released as a sequel to the 1983 Mario Bros

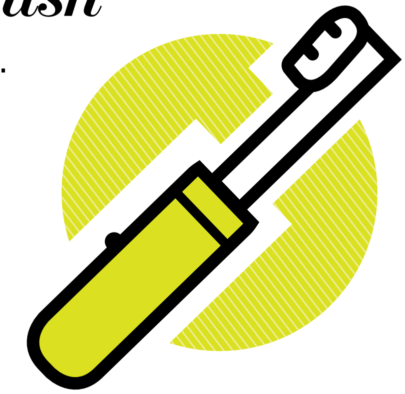
HEALTH

SLEEP STOCKPILE

We've been told that the only way to get over sleep deprivation is to catch up on it later. New research suggests you can 'bank' sleep in advance—an extra two hours the night before can apparently help one survive an all-nighter. The study, by the University of Calgary, Canada, also suggests that getting extra sleep before a late night improves physical performance and memory recall (*American Journal of Sports Medicine*, January 2017)

Be Careful with Your Toothbrush

It's a hothouse for germs and worse. Follow the following rules...



1 **Avoid the toilet**
If your toothbrush is near the toilet, always close the lid and flush as flushing disperses contaminated water droplets

2 **Never in the cabinet**
Never store a toothbrush inside the bathroom cabinet, where air cannot circulate. This could promote bacterial growth

3 **Keep it upright**
Keep it upright, in the open and avoid putting more than one brush in a mug, to avoid cross-contamination

4 **Replace it regularly**
Replace your toothbrush every three months. And do not ever share one

News You Can Use

HOT RED CHILLI PEPPERS

Researchers have found that regular consumption of chillies can bring down mortality rates by about 13 per cent (University of Vermont)

DON'T SIT TOO MUCH

Elderly women who sit for more than 10 hours a day were found to have cells that were older than their chronological age (University of California, San Diego)

FOR JEALOUS PARTNERS

When people in relationships feel jealous, they are likely to buy eye-grabbing products to recapture their partner's attention (Society for Consumer Psychology)

A Primer on Insulin

What is insulin? How does it work?

Insulin is a hormone secreted by the beta cells of the pancreas. It is an important regulator of carbohydrate metabolism. It acts like a key, by 'opening' the cells of the body to take up glucose

What is insulin resistance?

When the body's cells respond poorly to the action of insulin, the condition is known as insulin resistance. It can develop because of factors such as obesity or genetic and endocrine disorders

What are the symptoms?

Unfortunately, conditions such as insulin resistance and prediabetes do not have any symptoms. For example, prediabetes can only be diagnosed during a laboratory test of blood glucose levels

Insulin Resistance and Prediabetes

What is insulin and what does it do in the body?

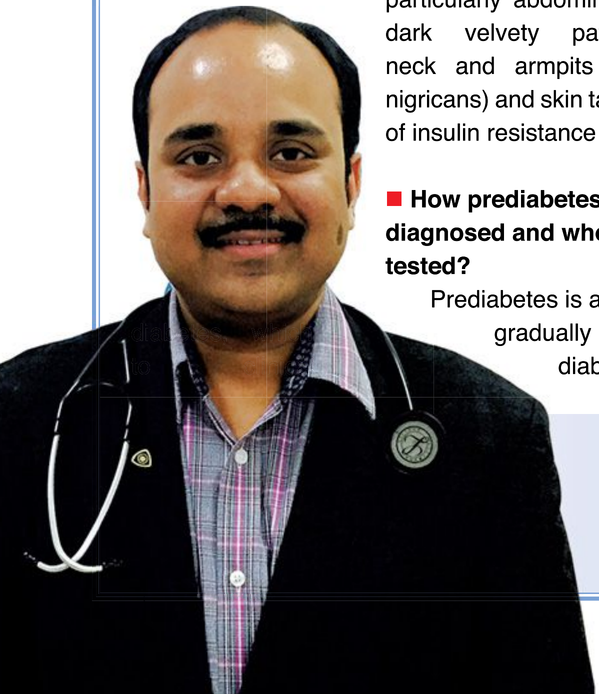
Insulin is a hormone secreted from beta cells of pancreas. Insulin is an important regulator of carbohydrate metabolism in the body. It acts like a key of a lock by opening the cells of the body to take up glucose. And by various metabolic pathways it stores energy in the form of glycogen, fat and protein in the cells. When insulin secretion is deficient or its action is defective, then the carbohydrate and other metabolisms are affected and that can lead to raised blood glucose level with poor utilisation of glucose by cells in the body.

What is insulin resistance? How does insulin resistance relate to prediabetes and Type 2 Diabetes?

When insulin is not able to do its usual work in the cells and tissues of the body, we call it insulin resistance, that means the cells are resistant to the action of insulin! When insulin action is defective then glucose is not utilised properly by the cells and more amount of glucose comes out from the cells. Similarly fats and proteins in the body starts degrading and all these things can lead to raised blood glucose level and ultimately diabetes mellitus. Insulin resistance can develop with increasing weight especially abdominal obesity, lack of exercise and poor lifestyle. Few genetic and endocrine disorders can also be associated with insulin resistance.

What are the symptoms of Insulin resistance and prediabetes?

Unfortunately insulin resistance and prediabetes do not have any symptoms, so most of the time they are under-recognised. Prediabetes can only be diagnosed during laboratory tests of blood glucose. However obesity and particularly abdominal adiposity, dark velvety patches over neck and armpits (acanthosis nigricans) and skin tags are signs of insulin resistance!



How prediabetes is diagnosed and who should be tested?

Prediabetes is a state before gradually progresses diabetes mellitus if not checked at the right moment. When fasting blood glucose in an individual is greater than 100 mg / dl and less than 126 mg / dl, it is known as Impaired Fasting Glucose (IFG) and when post prandial sugars after 75 gm of glucose load is greater than 140 mg / dl and less than 200 mg / dl, it is known as Impaired Glucose Tolerance (IGT). Both IFG and IGT are known as prediabetes. Now a day's glycosylated haemoglobin (otherwise known as HbA1C) levels between, 5.7% to 6.4% is also taken as prediabetes or borderline diabetes.

Since the condition is clinically asymptomatic, it needs regular screening of people who are at maximum risk. Following people should be screened for prediabetes:

- Age > 45 years
- Overweight or obese individual with any of the additional risk factors like- physical inactivity, family history of diabetes, high-risk ethnic population etc.
- Women who delivered a baby weighing > 9 lb,
- Having other risk factors like hypertension, low good cholesterol (HDL cholesterol level <35 mg / dl) and / or high triglyceride level > 250mg / dl

If results are normal, testing should be repeated at least at 3 - year intervals.

Can insulin resistance and prediabetes be reversed? How?

A healthy life style, that includes healthy food, regular exercise and maintenance of ideal body weight can reverse or at least halt the progression of this condition to overt diabetes. In very high risk patients a suitable drug is also added to the lifestyle changes.

Moderate physical activity of at least 150 min/week significantly reduces the progression. So, brisk walking of 20 - 30 minutes a day is strongly recommended for people with this condition.

Some tips on food are:

- Regular and moderate diet low in calories & low in fat.
- Avoid junk foods, sweets, bakery products, nuts, ghee or butter, red meat, all sweetened aerated beverages and fresh fruit juices.
- Food should be rich in dietary fibres like- fresh fruits, salads, vegetables, sprouts.
- Beverages like clear vegetable soups, tender coconut water, skimmed buttermilk, rasam or red tea can be taken any time of the day without adding any calories.

Dr. Sambit Das
MD, DM (Endocrinology, PGIMER, Chandigarh),
Senior Consultant Endocrinologist,
Apollo Sugar Clinics, Apollo Hospitals, Bhubaneswar,
Dr. Sambit's Centre of Diabetes and Endocrinology, Bhubaneswar.

PURUSHOTTAM DIWAKAR

INTERVIEW

Vikram Chandra: Translating to Television

Q: The Jaipur Literature Festival now has art, music, handicrafts, you name it. Has the tamasha begun to eclipse the authors?

A: I noticed that some people have been writing jaundiced criticisms along those lines. But I think it adds. It's like a big mela. You could feel [the focus on literature] is being diluted but for me it adds to the fun.

Q: Netflix is working on a series based on your novel, *Sacred Games*. What's it like watching type turn into TV?

A: I wanted to let go. When you're translating from one medium to another it's as difficult as translating from one language to another, and I'm too close to the book to try to see it in new ways. [As an executive producer] most of my job is to shut up and get out of the way.

Q: Are you still excited about so-called "Indian writingin English"?

A: Suddenly in the last 10 years you've seen a surge of chick lit and thrillers and especially all this mythological fiction. It's an interesting thing to think about how the new bourgeoisie is investigating itself culturally in this new fiction—especially the rewriting of all these mythological characters.

—with Jason Overdorf

BOOKS

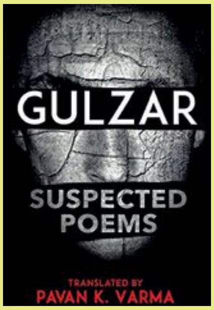
JLF 2017: HOT TYPE

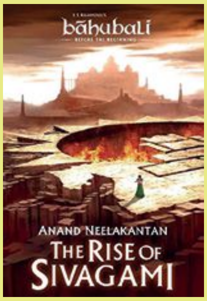
Musical performances, handicraft sales, art exhibitions and snipe sessions notwithstanding, the literapalooza in Jaipur is still about those black squiggly marks on paper. Here are some of the actual b-o-o-k-s that authors were shilling:

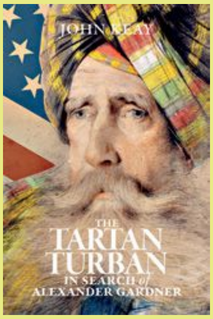
The Rise of Sivagami *by Anand Neelakantan*
You know a book is big when the publisher unveils the jacket like it's Salman Khan's next 'look'. That's the treatment Neelakantan's prequel to the wildly successful film *Baahubali*—which hits shelves in Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu on March 7—got in Jaipur. The story traces the childhood of the queen of Mahishmathi, Sivagami and the royal slave Kattappa.

Suspected Poems *by Gulzaar*
Beloved for his work in films from *Ijaazat* (yes!) to *OK Jaanu* (not so much), Gulzar injected some Hindi-Urdu street cred in his inaugural address, admonishing the brown sahibs to put more focus on Indian languages. Then again, he has several English translations of his screenplays out this year, as well as the first English translation of *Suspected Poems*.

The Tartan Turban *by John Keay*
The historian was in Jaipur for a few propah handshakes in advance of his upcoming tale of Alexander Gardner, *The Tartan Turban*. Unjustly forgotten, Gardner, a Scotch-American mercenary, was either "the nineteenth century's most intrepid traveller or its most egregious fantasist, or a bit of both", who served as a colonel in the Sikh army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.



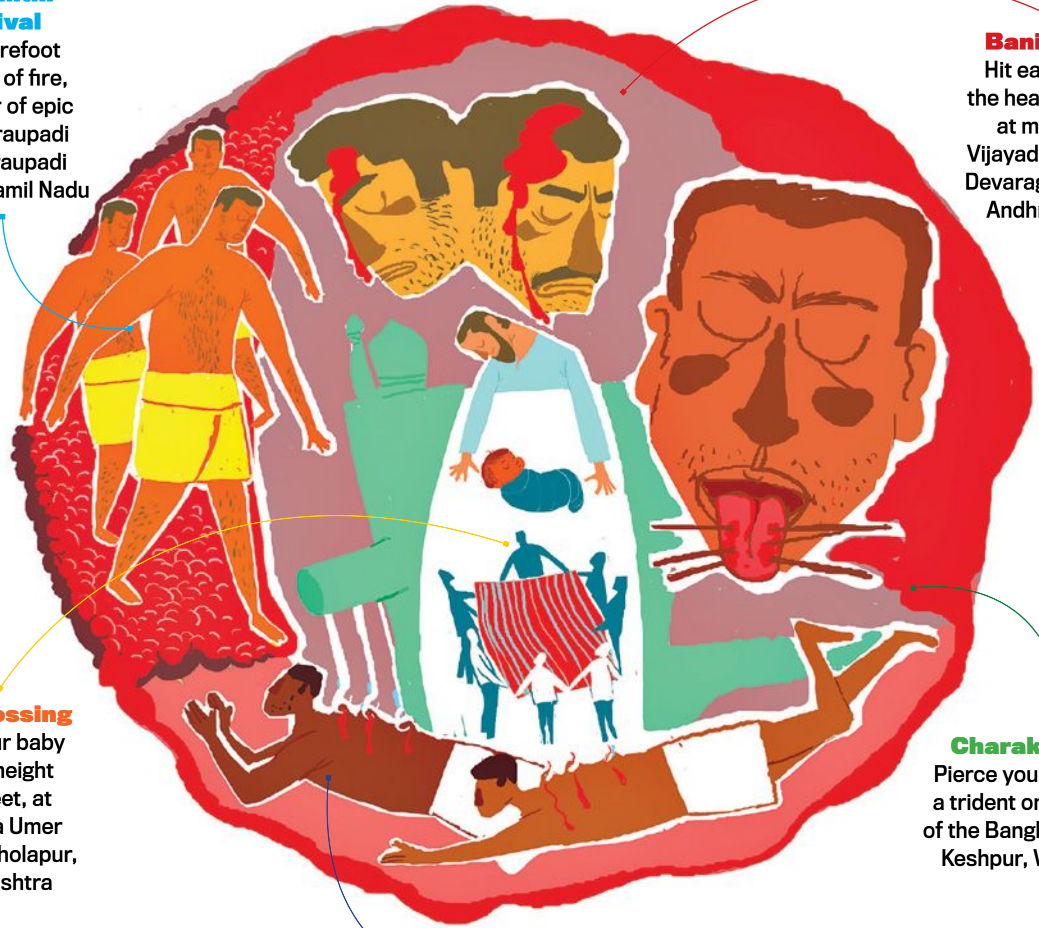




GLOSSARY

Bloodsports the Supreme Court Could Ban

Not just animals, we target humans in the name of tradition, too. Here's how:



Theemithi Festival
Walk barefoot on a bed of fire, in honour of epic queen Draupadi at the Draupadi temples, Tamil Nadu

Bani Festival
Hit each other on the head with sticks at midnight on Vijayadasami, at the Devaragattu Temple, Andhra Pradesh

Baby Tossing
Drop your baby from a height of 50 feet, at the Baba Umer Dargah, Sholapur, Maharashtra

Charak Festival
Pierce your tongue with a trident on the last day of the Bangla calendar, at Keshpur, West Bengal

Garudan Thookkam
Hang from a shaft like a bird, with hooks pierced into the skin of your back, at the Kali temples, South Kerala

Illustration by TITAS PANDA

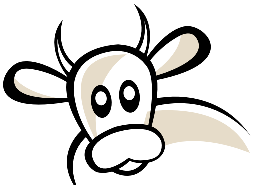
–Damayanti Datta

▲ GOOD NEWS

for Salman Khan, let off for being booked under a wrong section of the Arms Act

▼ BAD NEWS

for waiters, as to-tip or not-to-tip becomes India's newest dilemma



Guru Speak

Fakkad Baba, 73, of Mathura, filed a nomination for UP assembly polls. His 16th, since 1977. Lost every time. "If I win, all my MLA funds will go for cow welfare and for Mathura."

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Q+A

My Other Life

Sunny Leone, *actor,* up close and personal

Q: You just flew back to India for the opening of *Raees*. How is your life different in America?

A: It's not possible for me to walk around outside in India–I basically travel from bubble to bubble. In America, no one recognises me.

Q: What impact do you think you've had on Indian attitudes toward women's sexuality?

A: I don't know that I have had an impact. Women's sexuality is so personal. Each woman comes into her own at different times.

Q: Not many people know that you paint abstract art. Who's the last person you gifted one of your paintings?

A: [My husband] Daniel usually steals them and says I can't give any away. I don't sell them because I'm too insecure.

Q: What's the last picture you snapped with your mobile?

A: Kissing my husband on the cheek last night in the elevator. He made it black and white and it's so nice.

Q: What's the last thing that made you cry?

A: I just started watching [Netflix's] *The Crown*, and I started tearing up when Queen Elizabeth found out her dad died.

–with Jason Overdorf

Volume XLII Number 6; For the week Jan 31-February 6, 2017, published on every Friday Total number of pages 108 (including cover pages)

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Location courtesy THE ASTOR, Make-Up by UJJWAL DUTTA

COVER STORY

Couture and the City **s-4**
SIMPLY KOLKATA picks eight labels for your fashion fix

BUZZ

Into The City **s-9**
Three things to do in the city.

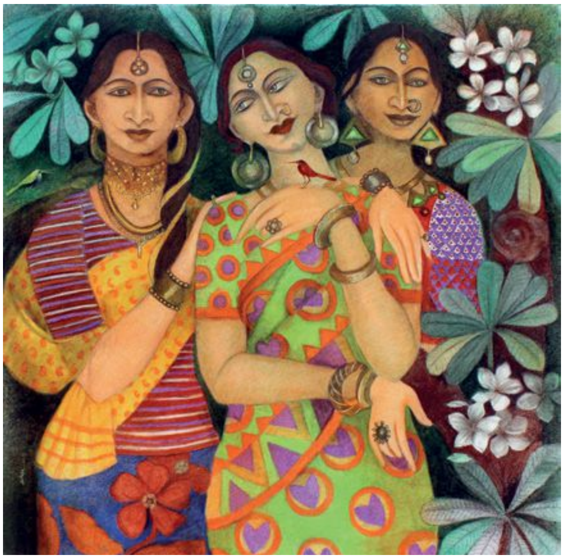
Cover photo by SUBIR HALDER;
Model SUBHASREE KAR;
Wardrobe by RUCERU;
Make-Up by MALAY ROY

OUR PICK of the month

The Romantics

February 14

Artists and husband and wife duo, Bratin and Sutapa Khan bring together their twin art styles for Songs of Amity, an exhibit. The paintings draw its subjects from Indian mythology and folklore. While Bratin paints Krishna and male figures in blue and cool colours, Sutapa paints the female figures in warmer and brighter tones.
At Emami Chisel Art, 687 Anandapur, EM Bypass
Tel 40113182



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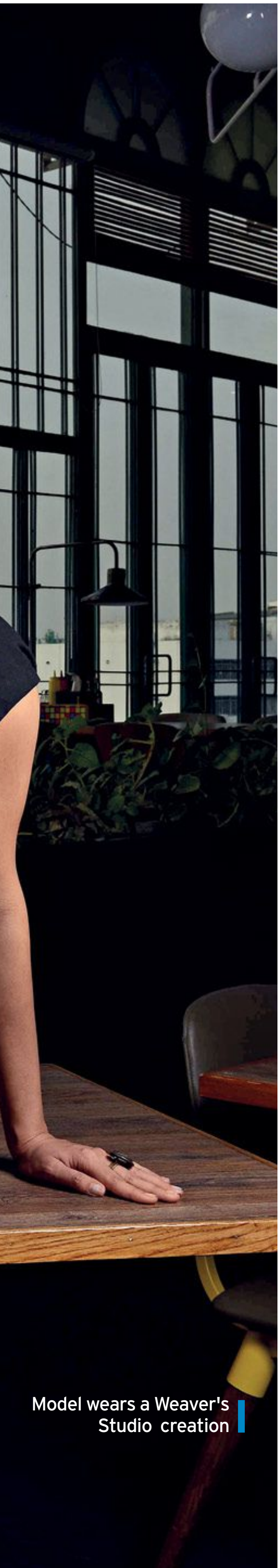
Photograph by SUBIR HALDER,
Model SALENA AHMED,
Wardrobe by WEAVERS STUDIO,
Jewellery by NARAYAN SINHA,
Make Up by MALAY ROY,
Location courtesy MONKEY BAR


Model wears a Weaver's Studio creation

By **MALINI BANERJEE**

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SUSTAINABLE DRAPES

WEAVERS STUDIO

For most of the fashion savvy in the city, Weavers Studio and its work with weaves, textiles and textile revival has been an open secret. But it's only when the 23-year-old brand showcased at the Lakme Fashion Week Winter Festive 2016 for the Sustainable Fashion and Indian Textile Day, that the rest of the country heard about it. With the motto of handcrafted and sustainable fashion, the studio has created a niche for itself. Its classic weaves are worn by Aparna Sen, Shabana Azmi, Nandita Das and many more.

The studio is known for its extensive work with kantha embroidery and more recently for its work in sourcing and reviving baluchari weaves—a craft rooted in the Bengali tradition. Their forthcoming collection will include hand-spun and hand-made fabrics like jamdani, khadi, wild silks and indigo dyed fabrics. Patchwork garments inspired by Japanese and Korean techniques in natural colours like red, off-white, indigo, grey, earthy browns will be seen.

- **AT** Weavers Studio, 5/1, Anil Moitra Road, Ballygunge Place
- **TEL** 24408926/27
- **WEBSITE** *weaversstudio.in*

POPULAR VOTE

PRANAY BAIDYA ATELIER

Only five years old, Pranay Baidya Atelier has become a Page Three favourite. While the label does evening wear for women, bridal wear, menswear and shoes, it's Pranay Baidya's saris specifically that have acquired distinction. "You can tell a Pranay

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Baidya sari from a mile away," says the 30-year-old designer.
This time his collection will include "the treasure trove of indigenous textiles" including fine kota silks, muslins, tussars, vintage Benarasis with antique styled jewel borders, floral thread work embroidery in jewel toned colours.

It's "opulent in colour, texture and fabric and yet aesthetically stimulating and wearable," says the designer. Sported by popular Kolkata names including stars like Parno Mittra and Mumtaz Sorcar, Baidya's work has become a bridal favourite too.

- **AT** Pranay Baidya Atelier, 4 B Allenby Road
- **CONTACT** *pranaybaidya.atelier@gmail.com*

GLOCAL COUTURE

VIZYON

If you are looking for a store that could bring the best of international fashion to your doorstep in Kolkata, turn to Vizyon. Creative director Shradha Murarka was schooled in international trends and style while working with the family export house and started Vizyon in 2007. The label that turns ten this year has been sported by Bollywood stars off and on but it was the famous one-shoulder black evening gown that Anushka Sharma sported while attending an event with Virat Kohli in 2016 that has suddenly made the label all the rage in the country.

The old-timers have always loved Vizyon not for its starry appeal but for its glamorous feel and its commitment to using "the best". "From French tulle, and hand crafted laces, to the latest Japanese beads, we have always made sure that every element that goes into making our clothes makes a woman feel the luxury they have invested in. We were one of the first people to use neoprene in our collection before most knew about the textile," says Murarka.

- **AT** Vizyon, 23
A Ballygunge Place,
- **TEL** 9836691999

Photograph by SUBIR HALDER

Shradha Murarka, creative director, Vizyon

BAG IT

SUEDE BY DEVINA JUNEJA

Accessory designer Devina Juneja did not always have an interest in fashion. It was only while working with her husband in the family-owned leather export house did she discover her aptitude for design. Travelling to trade fairs in Europe and UK gave her "a schooling in designing with leather". Launched in 2013, Suede by Devina Juneja comprises a line of clutches, satchels, totes, sling and shoulder bags and also an exclusive jewellery line of neckpieces.

Juneja uses a lot of techniques and weaves to provide a unique texture to her bags. Woven leather, leather with metallic finish, surface

From left: Payal Pratap, Namrata Joshipura, Himanshu Dogra, Rajesh Pratap Singh, Neeru Kumar, Pankaj of The Hangar

embellishments, or ombre dyed material are cut in unique patterns, hand sown and sprayed to craft interesting pieces. One of her most successful collections was Autumn, a collection that had hand-painted maple leaves in bright hues.

- **AT** Suede by Devina Juneja, 44 Matheswartalla Road (Opposite Science City)
- **TEL** 9830068686

New In Town

SIX IN ONE

THE HANGAR

Alipore's Rush Gym has a cool new fashionable hot spot as a neighbour. In Remont Road inside an abandoned Kolkata Port Trust shed, an industrial warehouse has made room for The Hangar, an ensemble store that features clothes and products by six designers from Delhi. Each corner represents a different designer and there's something for everyone. There is the quirky Playclan and classic textiles from Tulsi by Neeru Kumar. Namrata Joshipura brings contemporary chic with interesting embellishments while Pankaj and Nidhi bring a line of pastels with surface embellishments. Rajesh Pratap Singh brings his take on classic weaves with bespoke tailoring while Payal Pratap's prêt Line Umbar as well as her main label Payal Pratap showcase her elegant aesthetic.

The store is designed keeping an industrial setting in mind with fibre boards, steel piping, concrete and jali played up with plant boxes. When quizzed, most designers spoke about Kolkata's love affair with weaves as the main reason for deciding to stock their collections in the city.

While Payal Pratap calls the Kolkata fashionista "well travelled and aware of their textile and craft", Neeru Kumar describes Kolkata as sensitive to textiles.

- **AT** The Hangar, 144 Remount Road, opposite Toni and Guy salon, Alipore
- **TEL** 65000711

THE WEDDING PLAYER

MANOJ AGARWAL

Forty-six-year-old Manoj Agarwal's newly opened store on Park Street, looks like a regal Rajasthani haveli. Chandeliers, typical Rajasthani furniture, a winding staircase and a rich earthy ochre give this 1,500 sq ft store a feeling of being in a Rajput era fairytale.

His focus is bridal wear but he also does ethnic menswear for grooms since he believes "the marrying couple should look coordinated". Fabrics used are handloom weaves, silks and tussars which undergo intricate beading or embroidery by hand to achieve a finished and elegant look.

A lot of the motifs bear a

Rajasthani influence depicting floral or animal motifs, princesses or wedding rituals. The colour story for bridal wear includes a lot of traditional reds, pinks and oranges but also has a few offbeat pastels and blacks.

- **AT** Manoj Agarwal, Subham Building, 1 Park Street
- **TEL** 9830488819

Actor Elli Avram in a Manoj Agarwal creation

Photograph by DABBOO RATNANI

STAR PICK

ELYSIAN BY GITANJALI

Run by designer Gitanjali Fatehpuria, the label made its debut in 2016 and was launched by none other than the grand dame of Kolkata fashion, Anamika Khanna. Fatehpuria has had experience in designing for international fashion houses in Japan, Australia, UK and Europe and decided to launch her own brand name with a 2,500 sq ft. store in Panditiya (South Kolkata). Her most successful collection is a line of cocktail dresses in monochrome for which she still gets requests. Her upcoming line has a mix of A-line jumpsuits and shirt dresses with "interesting cuts". Drop waists, knee high slits, button-downs, asymmetric hemlines, layered tunics with Aladdin pants and embroidered bold floral patterns will be seen in the new collection.

Thanks to Anamika Khanna's stamp of approval, Kolkata fashionistas have been lining up for her clothes, including Tollywood stars like Koel Mallick, Parno Mittra, debutante Rukmini Maitra and model and actress Rachel White.

- **AT** Elysian by Gitanjali, 1 Panditia Terrace
- **TEL** 40728528

SISTERHOOD OF STYLE

RUCERU

Sisters and designer Ruchi Roongta and Rashi Agarwal made their debut in Lakme Fashion Week for summer resort 2016. Their last collection Dark Romance had a colour story of muted mustards, deep purples, burgundy, earthy greys and browns with a touch of bright yellow and orange to create an ombre effect.

The sisters believe in doing ethnic and bridal wear "with a twist instead of following a conventional three piece rule". Fabrics like crepe, chiffon, silk satin, silk habutai, raw silk are used to create pieces that though classified as ethnic wear, have an elegant contemporary feel. They also experiment with embroidery techniques such as traditional zardozi work with metallic filing, 3D flower embroideries, threadwork and butterfly appliqué.
Their forthcoming collection—A Lost Soul will use layers to play with sheer and translucent fabrics.

- **AT** Ruceru, Juthika Apartment, 11/1, Sunny Park 1st Floor, Flat 1B
- **TEL** 8335959892

The quirky interiors of Mamagoto

*RESTAURANT**REVIEW** / MAMAGOTO*

FUN WITH FOOD

If you are getting tired of good old Kolkata style Chinese on offer, there's a new "fun Asian" dine den to drop by in Kolkata. Azure Hospitality's Mamagoto has opened in Magma House, right next to Barbeque Nation on Park Street.

The 50-seater restaurant is spread out over two storeys, with its trademark decor of Japanese manga inspired art work covering exposed brick finish walls. The vibe is fun and colourful and the music quite loud so it may not make the best place for a long chatty lunch with your friends.

But the food is quite good, so you may not want to chat anyway. We started our meal with an ice cold cucumber mint mocktail which refreshing on a hot day though a bad idea when the mercury dips low. For starters we tried the Hot basil Chicken Cups. Though supposed to be spicy, we found it to be fairly mild. Next up, Cheese and Truffle Dumplings. Warm creamy cheese with the thinnest of coating, it was one dish we wished that served more to go around. The Snow Pea and Green Bean Salad too was surprisingly delicious and it's a dish worth ordering even your table is full of hard core carnivores. Laced with coconut milk, tamarind and sugar, its tangy sweet crunch is worth savouring over every bite. For desserts we tried the Homemade American Style Chunky Caramel Sponge Cake with toffee sauce that was served warm with vanilla ice-cream. It made for the perfect sweet ending.

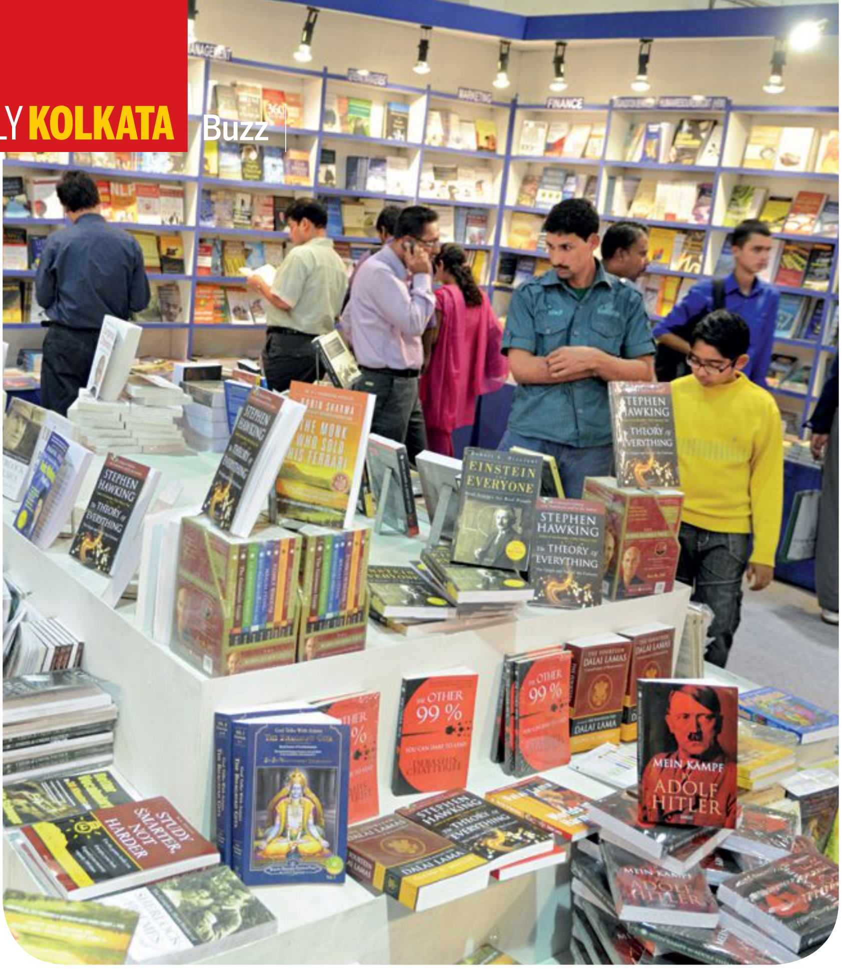
MEAL FOR TWO Rs 2,000

AT Mamagoto, 24, Park Street, Annex Building, Magma House Complex.

TEL 33999610

■ ***By Malini Banerjee***

Sip on a cucumber mint mocktail (above); try some delectable cheese dumplings (left)



WORLD OF WORDS

Come winter and it's time for Kolkata's favourite fair—the Kolkata Book Fair. The 41st International Kolkata Book Fair 2017 has Costa Rica has its focal theme country. Russia too will have a significant presence in celebration of its 70 year of diplomatic relations with India. Other participating countries include UK, USA, France, China, Japan, Vietnam, 11 Latin American countries and Bangladesh. To take on demonitisation, the fair will also have more than a dozen mobile ATMS. The fair is on till 5th February.
AT Milan Mela grounds, EM Bypass **TEL** 65004588

Pet Hangout

If you are at a loss about where to take your furry pal for his or her next play date, the swanky new pet friendly café The Love Room is just the answer for you. They have a four course pet menu, "dog beer" as well as nine resident pets (including a lhasa apso, a shih tzu, golden retriever, pug, Irish setter and more) who all take turns to come to the café to play with your furry friend.

There's also food for the pet owners as well with café specials being fish and chips and The Love Room special burger. Feeling lonely and missing your own pets? You're allowed to make friends with the resident doggies—Shadow, Gucci, Barney, Gogo or Tipsy Daruwala.
AT The Love Room, 36, Tollygunge Circular Road, First Floor **TEL** 65653365

GET CHIC

Looking for a new website to get your fashion fix from? Check out the Uptownie 101 website and clothing company that's run from Kolkata. The site sells contemporary womenswear at two different price points. Uptownie Lite is casual and affordable while Uptownie premium has, as the name suggests, premium apparel on the higher price.

Take your pick from tops, bottom, jumpsuits, dresses in bright chic cuts that are also available on other sites like Flipkart, Jabong and Amazon.

AT ***uptownie101.com***
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